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ABSTRACT

This monograph reviews the findings and recommendations of the Hispanic Dropout Project (HDP) and describes successful school-based strategies to combat the dropout problem and promote academic achievement among Hispanic students. Chapter 1 discusses the high Hispanic dropout rate; why Hispanic students drop out; stereotypes and realities; and HDP recommendations encompassing minimum guarantees of a quality education, schools' relationships with parents and families, the role of teachers, effective school strategies, and educational policy. Chapters 2-5 describe specific effective programs: (1) Lennox (California) Middle School's approach to personalizing the curriculum and involving parents and families; (2) Calexico (California) School District's secondary-level strategies, including emphasis on equity, commitment to bilingual education, a culture of continuous refinement, high expectations and support for meeting them, and alternative dropout programs; (3) three elementary programs--Success for All, Helping One Student to Succeed (HOSTS) (a mentoring and tutoring program), and Cognitively Guided Instruction (mathematics problem solving using students' prior knowledge); and (4) two secondary programs--the Coca-Cola Valued Youth program, in which high-risk middle school students tutor younger students, and Project AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), which features coaching, advocacy, and college preparation. In Chapter 6, four HDP members summarize observations and recommendations related to the quality of instruction, role of bilingual education, effects of tracking, resources and physical conditions, investing new resources, achieving attitudinal shifts, teacher preparation and professional development, identification and implementation of effective programs, challenging content and valuable relationships, individualization, time for results, aspects of program design and implementation, and politics of education. (Contains 13 references and a bibliography with an additional 131 references.) (SV)

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TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR HISPANIC YOUTH

Exemplary Practices, Programs, and Schools

Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood and Walter G. Secada

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Madison, Wisconsin
January, 1999

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CHAPTER ONE

The Hispanic Dropout Problem and Recommendations for Its Solution

On any given day in the United States, a shockingly high number of Hispanic students drop out of school. They often leave quietly, with no notice to the school or their teachers, as early as the middle grades—sometimes even earlier—and never return. Unfortunately, when students abandon school, they foreclose a lifetime of opportunities and place future generations at risk of poverty, low academic achievement, and underemployment.

The steep price they pay for leaving school—whether they are pushed out or leave of their own volition—has ramifications that reverberate beyond the purely personal. For business, school abandonment by members of the nation's fastest growing population creates a lack of highly skilled employees, fewer entrepreneurs, and poorer markets. For communities, the high dropout rate among Hispanic students cumulates the risk of low voter participation and civic breakdown. Today we operate in a global, high-tech economy; the high-wage, low-skill factory jobs that lifted generations of Americans from poverty and empowered them to buy homes, send their children to college, and take care of themselves and their families are fast becoming little more than a memory.

How acute is the problem of Hispanic dropout? While the dropout rate is measured in various ways, the most recently available data from the United States Census Bureau (1994) reveal that *nearly one in three (30 percent)* of the nation's Hispanic students between the ages of 16 and 24 left school without either a high school diploma or an alternative certificate such as a GED (please see Note 1).

This alarmingly high dropout rate is particularly jarring when considered within the context of the nation's overall dropout rate, a rate that has fallen steadily since the 1950s. In 1994, for example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that eight percent of the United States' 16- to 24-year-old white students and 13 percent of its black nonHispanic students dropped out of school—compared to 30 percent of Hispanic students. In fact, *the Hispanic dropout rate is only four percent lower than when national dropout data for Hispanics were first collected in 1972,* and higher than it was twenty years ago. At a time when the total population of Hispanics in the United States continues to increase rapidly, this grim statistic highlights the urgency of the Hispanic dropout crisis.

The Hispanic Dropout Project

As a partial response to this crisis, United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley appointed a group of research scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners to study issues surrounding the Hispanic dropout problem and to provide him with a set of policy-relevant recommendations. From September 1995 through the next two years of its work, the Hispanic Dropout Project (HDP)—as this group came to be known—held open hearings and took public testimony in locations around the nation whose schools enrolled large numbers of Hispanic students. The HDP held press conferences at those sites to publicize the problem of Hispanic dropout, and reviewed the extant research on at risk students and school dropout. It commissioned research syntheses on (a) effective achievement programs for elementary and middle school, (b) effective dropout prevention programs for junior high and high school, (c) issues in the conceptualization of early school departure, and (d) teacher education for diversity and equity.

To illustrate the research and highlight exemplary schools and programs—many of which could be replicated around the nation—the HDP also commissioned a series of nontechnical case studies that illustrate the themes found in (a) through (d) above. In the following chapters, we present cases drawn from those studies. These narratives exemplify the recommendations of the HDP.

We begin this chapter by discussing the most common explanations for Hispanic dropout. Next, we turn to Hispanic students and what schooling needs to offer to counteract the powerful forces that encourage—if not force—them to drop out. To broaden this discussion, we focus on Hispanic parents and families in tandem with what schools need to extend to them. We then discuss the role of teachers, as well as the role of schools, in mitigating the Hispanic dropout crisis. We close with a consideration of policies that need to be taken at the local, state, and national levels.

Why Do Hispanic Students Drop Out?

Why is the dropout rate among Hispanic students so perilously and unacceptably high, and why does it show no signs that it will diminish? Various explanations have been advanced to account for the high dropout rate among Hispanic students, but two in particular have become quite common in the general press: Immigration and/or low socioeconomic status. A closer look at the data, however, discloses that the explanation is more complex.

Dropout rates for Hispanics are higher than for nonHispanics of similar immigration and generational status. Among foreign-born immigrants, 43 percent of Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 24 (young adults) have dropped out of school versus eight percent of nonHispanics. Among first-generation U.S.-born young adults, 17 percent of Hispanics versus six percent of nonHispanics have dropped out. Second- or later-generation U.S.-born young adults show even higher dropout rates; 24 percent of the Hispanics in this group have dropped out of school versus 11 percent of nonHispanics (NCES, 1998).

While many Hispanic students live in conditions of severe poverty, Hispanic dropout rates are at least double those of other Americans at the same income level. That is, wealthy Hispanics are *twice as likely* as wealthy whites or wealthy African Americans to drop out of school without a diploma (NCES, 1998). Although the dropout rate is measured in various ways (please see Note 2), no matter how it is measured, Hispanics are more likely to drop out of school than are nonHispanics who are similarly situated.

Dropping out is not a random, casual act. According to some observers, dropping out of school is the logical outcome of the social forces that limit Hispanics' role in society. Many Hispanic students live in the nation's most economically distressed areas. They attend overcrowded schools that are in physical disrepair, are inadequately staffed, and lack sufficient instructional materials. Hispanic youth see the devastating effects of their elders' limited employment opportunities and job ceilings. They encounter stereotypes, personal prejudice, and social bias that often is part of larger anti-immigrant forces in this society. For many Hispanics, the United States does not appear to be a society of opportunities. Not surprisingly—faced with evidence of lingering institutional bias against Hispanics—these students figure: "The American dream is not for me. Why bother?" And of course, they drop out.

Unchecked, this crisis can only worsen and intensify. The Census reports that, because of demographic growth, at least a million more elementary students—many of them Hispanic—will be enrolled in the nation's schools by the year 2000 (NCES, 1998). Without quick and concerted intervention, the number of children—again, many of them Hispanic—who live in poverty will increase. Without adequate funding that is used effectively, particularly in the high-poverty schools attended by many Hispanic children, classes will become even more overcrowded, instructional materials more woefully out of date, and attrition of qualified staff will increase.

But there are specific actions that schools and school staff can take with Hispanic students, with their parents and families, and with the quality and nature of the instruction they deliver, that will help propel Hispanic students into a positive future. In its final report, *No More Excuses*, the Hispanic Dropout Project (1998) outlined specific recommendations that, if followed—as they were in the exemplary sites profiled later in this monograph—could bear remarkable results. We recap those recommendations below.

Hispanic Students: Myths and Realities

The most important recommendation of the HDP—one that colors all its other recommendations—was that, contrary to much reported experience, Hispanic students deserve to be treated as if they matter. They must be acknowledged by all educational stakeholders as youth with abilities and talents who will add to the good of society. Hispanic students need to be greeted every day of their schooling experience with high expectations that they will succeed. They need to be sustained by a personal connection with the adults in their schools that proves to them that school staff are committed to maximizing their academic achievement and their psychosocial well-being. In support of this conclusion, the HDP had two overarching findings and recommendations that affect Hispanic students and their educational futures:

- Schools and school staff must connect themselves—both institutionally and personally—to Hispanic students and their families, provide Hispanic students with a high-quality education based on rigorous standards, and provide backup options to push both students and staff past obstacles that come up on the way to achieving those rigorous standards.

- Students and their families deserve respect. In many cases, this means that school staff and other educational stakeholders must change long-held conceptions of Hispanic students and their families. These stakeholders need to see Hispanic students as central to the future well-being of the United States rather than as foreign and unwelcome. They also need to recognize that Hispanic families have social capital on which to build.

> Hispanic students deserve genuine opportunities to learn and to succeed in later life—rather than being dismissed as deficient because of their language and culture.

Through all of its recommendations, the HDP underscored the importance of respect and its place in schooling as a basic, fundamental condition without which Hispanic students will find it difficult to achieve academic success. Too frequently, well-meaning school staff think of and portray Hispanic students as poor things who cannot achieve—as "pobrecitos"—which is both patronizing and illogical. Treating students and their families as deviant or deficient is neither correct nor helpful when educators design programs and intervention strategies, yet such views dominate in conventional schools.

Sadly, the Project found that stereotypes about Hispanic students and their families continue to flourish. These powerful stereotypes cloud the dropout problem, making it seem insurmountable. Educators, community members, and other educational stakeholders may believe that Hispanic students: do not care about school, do not want to learn, do not come to school ready to learn, use drugs, belong to gangs, or engage in violence, cannot achieve, have cultural backgrounds that are incompatible with schools, do not know English and do not want to learn English, are illegal immigrants, and/or do not merit help and do not deserve to be taken seriously.

More sympathetic stereotypes are just as deadly, because they disable Hispanic students and render them powerless. These stereotypes hold that Hispanic students are: unable to do anything about their education because they are poor, the children of drug users, victims of domestic violence and abuse, unable or unwilling to speak and write English well, and/or lacking in the necessary ingredients of success through no fault of their own.

While the cumulation of these stereotypes indicates that Hispanic children should not be held to high standards, the HDP found that the reverse is true: Hispanic students are most likely to learn when curricular content challenges their minds and provokes their curiosity. In visits to early childhood, elementary, and alternative high school programs, Project members observed that Hispanic students were very engaged when working with content that was relevant, interesting, and well-taught.

In the Project's visits to less effective schools, many older students complained about boredom and a lack of rigor in their classes. They spoke of dull, unchallenging, and irrelevant curricula. These students had internalized a clear but pernicious message of low expectations, heightened by aversive physical circumstances such as overcrowded, underresourced classrooms. Students, dropouts, and former dropouts testified that they could not ask questions and get answers in class, which led them to believe that their teachers did not really care about them (please see Note 3).

These stereotypes and the conditions of schooling that result from them can be overcome. Based on its observations and review of research, the HDP recommended a minimum set of guarantees for Hispanic students:

1. ***Each individual Hispanic student should have someone who understands how schools work and who is willing to take personal responsibility to ensure that the student makes it in and through school.***

Project members discovered that Hispanic students who remained in school (despite peer pressure, economic pressure, and other factors that pushed out many of their friends) often pointed to someone in that school—a teacher, coach, some other school staff member, someone from the larger community—whose personal interest nurtured their individual sense of self-worth and supported their efforts *not only to stay in school, but to succeed in school.* The cases that comprise the remaining chapters in this monograph bear eloquent testimony to the multitude of imaginative school and individual responses proven effective in combating the Hispanic dropout rate.

2. ***Hispanic students should receive high-quality educations that guarantee that all students leave third grade able to read. They should experience curricula that are relevant and interesting, convey high expectations, and demand student investment in learning. They should understand the options that are available to them so that they can make informed decisions about their lives. They should be able to envision their futures with confidence based on an education that provides them the tools needed to make their visions into reality.***

The HDP concluded that junior high school was far too late to *begin* dropout prevention efforts. Successful experiences must begin in the early grades and continue throughout Hispanic students' schooling. On the other hand, early interventions, *by themselves,* are not enough. Later efforts must build on the successes of early interventions.

The Project learned that older students who had dropped out of school often believed that they had no other choice. School personnel either did not know about or did not tell students about alternative programs because of fiscal pressures to remain quiet about those programs. A former dropout quit his original school because, as he starkly put it, "It was either school or dropping out." He entered an alternative school only because a friend told him about it.

A former dropout told the Project that one reason many Hispanics leave school is that they believe the American dream is for someone else, not for them. Effective dropout interventions reviewed by the Project included all students in that dream. These interventions provided Hispanic students chances to meet and talk with Hispanic college students, visit college campuses, and interact with successful Hispanic adults. Effective interventions also allowed students opportunities to plan their lives after high school in work, the military, or some form of continuing education.

The Project found that successful interventions emphasize coaching Hispanic youth to succeed—rather than rescuing them from failure. Coaching empowers youth. It credits youngsters for what they achieve, providing them with encouragement and opportunities to take responsibility for their learning and adult lives. Coaching also provides youth the opportunity to receive guidance as they set long-range, real-life goals and to take the steps needed to reach those goals. Adults who advocate for students, who encourage students to dream about their futures, who mentor students on how to achieve those dreams, and who hold students accountable for their actions can provide needed support for students to make their visions of the future come true.

3. ***Schools should be responsive to the behaviors and needs of individual children. They should target Hispanic students for prosocial roles.***

When respect, responsibility, membership, and opportunities for leadership are denied to students by their schools, gang activity and other antisocial behaviors often fill the void. The most effective schools that the Project visited gave students opportunities to assume important roles in school life and also to help other students. These schools expected—and consequently, often received—the best from their Hispanic students. Effective schools also realized that real students have real problems. These schools were distinguished by their flexible, imaginative approach to problem-solving, and also by effective backup strategies that solved problems when they arose.

4. ***Hispanic students have the right to schools and classrooms that are safe, healthy, free from intimidation, and inviting places to learn—that is, where their language and culture are treated as resources.***

National statistics show that many Hispanic students attend among the most dangerous schools in the United States. Schools need to provide students with positive, appealing alternatives to antisocial behaviors, such as gang membership. Beyond sheer safety and engaging activities, school should be a place where a student's language and cultural background are treated with respect.

5. ***Hispanics' schools should have the resources necessary to provide safe environments and high-quality educations.***

Troubled schools beset with financial woes lack even the most basic resources. From fights breaking out due to jostling in overcrowded halls, to buildings that are eyesores or long-ignored fire hazards, the basic infrastructure for effective schooling is too frequently missing from the schools attended by Hispanic students. Outdated textbooks, woeful lab facilities, antiquated libraries, the absence of a challenging academic curriculum and the requisite instructional resources all encourage Hispanic students to cut short their affiliation with schooling. As one adult testified: *Who, in his or her right mind, would want to stay in such conditions?*

Hispanic Parents and Families

How does schooling intersect with Hispanic parents and families and how might it improve its efforts to solve the Hispanic dropout problem? Just as Hispanic students suffer from the stereotypes delineated above, Hispanic parents and families are frequently perceived as indifferent to their children's education, moving too frequently, not speaking or wanting to learn how to speak (read, or write) English, and being too undereducated to properly educate their children.

Parents and families also are often portrayed as victims unable to do anything about the racism they experience and unable to understand American cultural norms. Parents are said to be ignorant, poor, products of bad schools, in conflict with their children, and in general, culturally deprived.

But even though these stereotypes about Hispanic parents and families linger, the HDP observed many schools that worked effectively with Hispanic parents. These observations—backed up by the testimony of countless parents and by the extensive research on the importance of effective parent involvement—proved that such stereotypes are incorrect and wrongheaded. Large-scale national studies and targeted research show that, on the contrary, Hispanic parents and families value learning and seek to support their children in school.

Further testimony was provided to the Project by Hispanic students, who almost unanimously reported that they wanted to succeed as a way to thank their parents and families for the sacrifices that they had made. These students wanted to make their parents proud of them. They wanted to better themselves and did not want to disappoint their parents by quitting school. One-time dropouts spoke about their parents' disappointment in them as well as the love, support, pressure, and encouragement that they received from their parents to stay in school, then to return to school, to try hard and to learn.

The HDP's hearings were attended by Hispanic parents who were anxious about their children's educational futures. Many parents found out about the hearings by word of mouth, and their testimony demonstrated their readiness to be involved in their children's education. Parents noted that, in order to be involved, they must often overcome school resistance and hostility to that involvement.

At almost every city visited by Project members, Hispanic parents said that their children's schools did not take them or their concerns very seriously. One mother recounted being told of her child's suspension hearing just 30 minutes before it was held. Risking her job, she rushed to the school, only to wait all morning in the school office and to be told abruptly that the meeting had been postponed. One father did, in fact, lose his job because of the time he spent trying to keep his daughter from, in his words, being pushed out. Another mother reported—in flawless English—how her child's principal would not speak directly to her, supposedly because her accent made it too difficult for school personnel to understand her.

Hispanic parents testified eloquently to the Project about their dreams and aspirations for their children's futures—as well as the roles that schools must play in educating their children. In a Head Start program, in community and recreation centers that provided social services for students, and in community action groups—all visited by the HDP—Hispanic parents volunteered as tutors, instructional assistants, fundraisers, program implementers, and in many other roles.

When Hispanic parents see clear benefits to their children from their participation and when parents are given meaningful roles and responsibilities, many parents will do more than they are asked. For example, one of the few longitudinal studies of a successful dropout prevention program reported that Hispanic parents cooperated much more readily with the program's recommendations than did the schools and the teachers (Larson and Rumberger, 1995).

The findings of the HDP clearly indicate that empowering parents to support their children's education and to work for better schools is a fundamental component of effective schooling. They made the following recommendations targeted to families, parents, and schools:

1. ***Hispanic parents and families need to negotiate their children's educational system.***

Hispanic parents must advocate for their children because no one else will—or can—do the job as well as they. Beyond individual advocacy, parents can find strength through active membership in church and community groups that rely on their size and political clout to ensure that parents' concerns are taken seriously and that provide necessary services such as recreational and afterschool tutoring programs.

2. ***Schools should recruit Hispanic parents and extended families into a genuine partnership of equals for educating Hispanic students.***

The most impressive schools visited by the HDP aggressively recruited parents to work with them in educating their children. Parent roles were authentic and appropriate. For instance, school personnel helped graduating students and their parents to understand and to fill out various financial aid forms for college. At the same school, parents whose children engaged in inappropriate behaviors were helped to recognize how their own behaviors enabled their children to avoid responsibility. When those parents knew what to look for, they monitored their children's behaviors and held them accountable for avoiding antisocial activities and for getting to school on time. These parents' behaviors show that they understood that their advocacy for their children and their partnership with the school continued at home by the parents' fulfilling their side of the bargain.

Conversely, schools that were less successful or seemed to be actively pushing students out were also those schools which, by their messages and practices, seemed to actively blame parents and families for their children's failures. Parents complained bitterly about such schools to the Project.

3. ***Hispanic parents should be helped to envision a future for their children and a reasonable means by which to plan for and achieve that future.***

One of the most powerful incentives mentioned by Hispanic students was their parents' and families' determination that these students have better lives than those experienced by the older generation. Parents want better lives for their children—schools should help parents learn what is available for their children and help parents provide these opportunities for their children. That Hispanic parents can motivate their children and that schools can provide information about opportunities for students should provide the basis for the aforementioned partnership.

Teachers and Hispanic Students

Teachers and other school staff can and must make a difference in students' lives. In spite of this imperative, many teachers feel powerless. Excuses such as: "The problem is too big for one teacher. How can I, a single teacher, hope to overcome the effects of students' backgrounds?" are common. This particular reasoning portrays teachers as helpless when dealing with students who are not ready or do not want to learn. Hispanic students are said to lack something (usually English); their aspirations or those of their parents are said not to support schooling.

Similarly, overcrowded classrooms are said to be the reason that teachers can attend to just so many students. Hence, a type of academic triage results: Some students must be sacrificed so that others can be taught. Not surprisingly, those who are sacrificed are portrayed as uneducable—unwilling or unable to learn. On the other hand, Hispanic students at HDP hearings across the country suggested that at least some of their teachers were unwilling to help them learn; these students leveled the most damning charge possible against some of their teachers: "They just don't care."

Neither extreme is the rule. During HDP open hearings and visits to schools, Project members encountered many teachers who made a difference in their students' lives. These teachers tried hard to help Hispanic students succeed. Some had developed teaching practices designed to engage their students. Others provided counseling and mentored students. All constantly worked to improve how they taught their students. All communicated a deep sense of caring, high expectations, respect, and commitment to their students. In some cases, teachers' unpaid commitment to their students' well-being was far beyond anything called for in their job descriptions. Examples of these caring individuals are provided later in this monograph.

The Project found that excellent teachers are not naive; nor are they so sympathetic to the out of school problems experienced by many Hispanic students that they become ineffectual. Instead, they are acutely aware of the challenges that their students face and very realistic about individual student's situations. What distinguished teachers who made a difference from those who did not was that effective teachers used their knowledge of Hispanic students' academic, social, and psychological characteristics as a foundation and a source of competence on which to build. These teachers passionately believed that, because of their teaching and personal concern for their students, they made a difference in their students' lives. Students and parents agreed.

Hispanic students reported that teachers who really cared about them as individuals often provided them with the inspiration and personal support needed to get through hard times. When asked why they stayed in school, students (many with friends who had dropped out of school) pointed to a teacher or other school person as someone who had taken a special interest in them and nurtured their dreams for the future.

Less successful teachers do not really understand their Hispanic students' lives. They do not use what they know about their students as a foundation on which to build. Instead, they use what they know about their students to explain away failure and also to push away responsibility for that failure.

Unerringly, students know the difference and respond positively to the good teachers that they encounter. Instead of scurrying out of class as soon the bell marked its end, students with effective teachers would stay to ask a question, to discuss a new insight about the day's work, or simply to share something that had happened outside of school. Project members saw such student behaviors in secondary mathematics classes, in alternative school settings, and in interactions with middle school generalist teachers.

When asked about the features of alternative schools or programs that they most appreciated, almost every student interviewed by the Project pointed to the personalized relationships that they developed with their teachers and the individualized attention that they received. Many students realized that this attention was possible because of the smaller class size in their schools. These students also spoke about the mutual respect and caring that developed between themselves and the staff in their school. This respect was communicated to the students in countless ways by adults who were available to them in a mentoring capacity. A volunteer at a social service agency would tell students that, like them, he too had dropped out of school but had later achieved his goals by believing in himself and being persistent. A retired teacher insisted that all of her students could learn to read, and she provided them with the support to do so.

The following are recommendations for all teachers of Hispanic students.

1. ***Teachers should teach content so that it interests and challenges Hispanic students. They should help students to learn that content. They should communicate high expectations, respect, and interest to each of their students. They should understand the roles of language, race, culture, and gender in schooling. They should engage parents and the community in the education of their children.***

Effective instruction requires knowing the student and tapping into her or his strengths and interests to trigger learning. Effective teachers use parents as allies to extend learning outside the classroom. They provide parents with a stream of timely feedback and help parents see concrete ways of extending their children's learning outside the classroom. Teachers who are not familiar with the lives of their students, their words, and their backgrounds find it hard to be highly effective.

As Project members observed, under the pressures of daily life in hectic, overcrowded schools, harried teachers may find themselves unintentionally sending the wrong message. Teachers need to monitor themselves or receive in-service training to ensure that Hispanic students and their families receive the message that they are really wanted in the classroom and in school, that excellence is within their reach, and that success depends on working together.

2. ***Teachers should become knowledgeable about and develop strategies to educate Hispanic students and to communicate with their parents. Teachers should receive the professional development needed to develop those attitudes and skills.***

Ongoing professional development should help teachers learn about their students' backgrounds and interests, curriculum adaptation, and other instructional strategies for heterogeneous student populations. Teachers should be familiar with second language acquisition theory, and how to adapt instruction for students of varying levels of English language proficiency. Teachers' knowledge of their students' cultural heritage and the implications of language learning and loss are important for effective teaching and the creation of well-functioning home-school linkages.

Schools and Hispanic Students

Schools are the most important focal point for dropout prevention. The research on dropout prevention, effective schools, restructuring schools, the HDP's commissioned papers, and its case studies of effective schools—all concluded that schools, in fact, do matter in students' lives. In the course of the Project's explorations, its members found powerful, experiential evidence that schools matter positively in keeping Hispanic students in school and in helping them to achieve academically. The most impressive schools had teachers and staff who worked together to personalize each student's school experience. Teachers collaborated to ensure that no Hispanic student fell through the cracks, either academically or psychosocially. Staff who spoke Spanish were respected for their ability to communicate with students' parents; indeed, many of these schools aggressively recruited multilingual, multiethnic staff who could relate to their students and parents.

The HDP saw secondary schools and an entire school system, profiled later in this monograph, in which Hispanic students graduated in greater numbers than in similar schools. These compelling examples challenge the myth that secondary schools are doomed to be cold and impersonal places for students or that they are too difficult to change into personalized and caring places. The Project also visited elementary and middle schools that made special efforts to ensure that all their children learned how to read, achieved academically, and became better connected to their school. Recognizing the real world challenges that their students faced, principals, teachers, and other school staff spoke with determination about Hispanic students learning, about not losing students, and about always trying to do better. Teachers at one elementary school, for instance, said that they were relentless in ensuring that all of their Hispanic students—even students who did not speak English—could read by third grade.

Moreover, out of school alternative programs for students who could not attend regular school used the latter as reference points by providing a curriculum that mirrored what was offered in regular schools, by tutoring and helping students with their homework, and by helping to return students to their original schools. Their services, therefore, were linked to the school and its educational programs.

On the negative side, the research literature paints an unflattering portrait of schools that do nothing to improve their dropout rates, that use subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) means to encourage Hispanic students to leave school, and that deny Hispanics educational opportunity. The staff at such schools behave as if the students (and their parents) are so rife with social problems that there is nothing that they can do. The HDP heard some school and district staff claim that schools could do very little to reduce the Hispanic dropout rate because of student poverty, lack of student readiness or desire to learn, language, excessive student mobility, excessive costs, lack of qualified staff, lack of knowledge about the real causes of the problem, lack of parental concern, parental aspirations that do not include school, and earlier efforts that have failed. Schools, according to these individuals, can do very little about the larger social ills that befall their students. The literature is clear: Schools where such beliefs are the norm are not likely to be very successful either in ensuring that large numbers of their Hispanic students graduate or in educating many of their students very well.

The HDP found five characteristics of schools that make a difference in their students' education. These schools:

- possess high academic and behavioral standards for their students;
- communicate these standards clearly, supporting students as they work to meet the standards;
- connect their students in significant ways to adults;
- connect their students to the future, through college entrance and the work force; and
- provide families with useful information about how their children are performing in school and about the planning they are doing for their futures.

The Project, although impressed with the quality of the alternative programs it observed, cautioned that these programs can disintegrate into little more than holding pens for students identified as *problems* and that these programs cannot replace high-quality schools. However, many schools can learn from the alternative programs the Project observed. Students reported that they felt valued by staff in these settings; staff accepted their students' experiences but encouraged students to consider the consequences of their actions.

While the Project found outstanding schools and programs nationally, it should be emphasized that they remain a rarity for Hispanic students. However, there is little about these schools and programs that cannot be replicated, and the HDP points to the following guidelines for schools as they combat the Hispanic dropout issue:

1. ***Schools should emphasize the prevention of problems. They need to become more aggressive in responding to the early warning signs that a student may be doing poorly in, losing interest in, or in some other way, becoming disengaged from school.***

Schools should be alert to early warning signs of student disengagement. If, for example, a student has two unexcused absences in a row from school, parents should be contacted by a live person—by phone or even by a home visit. The immediacy and personalization of the contact make a difference.

Minorities are overrepresented in special education programs. Schools should ensure that their assignment practices are valid; more importantly, they should emphasize the interventions that prevent such placements.

2. ***Schools, especially high schools, need to personalize programs and services that work with Hispanic students.***

Strategies that could be adopted by a high school trying to personalize its programs and services include the reduction of individual class size, reduction in the number of different classes that teachers must teach, creation of schools within schools or of a smaller high school for all but a few highly specialized classes, the creation of houses or academies within a large high school, team teaching involving fewer students, teachers serving as counselors for or "adopting" a few students, and older students serving as mentors for younger students.

3. ***Schools should be restructured to ensure that all students have access to high-quality curricula. They should reconfigure time, space, and staffing patterns to provide students with additional support needed to achieve.***

School restructuring needs to attend to the nature of the curriculum that is provided to students so that all students encounter a curriculum that is demanding, interesting, and engaging.

Secondary and junior high schools should eliminate their lowest tracks. Relative to advanced placement tracks, low-track classrooms are overcrowded, have the least qualified teachers, have the fewest resources, and experience a low-level curriculum focused on remediation to the virtual exclusion of any new or interesting content. If tracking is to be anything for large numbers of Hispanic students other than the final stop en route to being pushed out, these conditions must change.

Hispanic students should be recruited actively into the highest tracks and provided with the support to succeed. In addition to placing students in more demanding curricular settings, schools should provide added support for students such as libraries, afterschool programs, individualized tutoring, counseling, and social service referrals.

4. ***Schools should replicate programs that have proven effective. In addition to using new funding, schools should redeploy existing resources to run these programs.***

The HDP found programs and efforts that have proven effective or show promise for improving Hispanic student achievement and lowering the dropout rate. Schools do not have to reinvent these programs. They should be prepared to adapt existing programs to the needs of their students and to local conditions.

Although any program has start up costs and schools are strapped for resources, many programs visited by the Project and reviewed in its commissioned papers can be implemented through a combination of new and old funding, and a reconfiguration of existing roles and responsibilities.

5. Schools should carefully monitor the effectiveness of their programs and continuously try to improve them or to replace them with more reliable strategies.

School effectiveness in reducing Hispanic dropout rates or in increasing student achievement will not be accomplished overnight. The most impressive programs visited by the Project had been developed and improved over the years by their staffs. These schools and programs had carefully recruited staffs who supported their mission and respected their students: they fine tuned their strategies for teaching students and for preventing dropout, recruited parents into partnerships, developed credibility and support within the Hispanic and business communities, and were entrepreneurial in raising funds to support their efforts.

In talking with members of the HDP, school personnel and concerned community people highlighted many well-meaning efforts. Yet they were unable to provide convincing, research-based evidence that their programs were reaching targeted students or that the programs were effective. Schools and communities should monitor their efforts, keep what works well, modify what could be improved, and discard what does not work.

6. Schools and alternative programs should be better coordinated.

Students noted they often had a hard time making the transition from an alternative program back to school. Personnel working in alternative programs had similar concerns about schools' lack of cooperation with their efforts to provide students with a meaningful education until they could return to school.

District, State, and National Policies

School districts, states, and the nation as a whole influence whether Hispanics drop out or stay in school. School districts' influence is felt through their governance of schools, their recruitment of a workforce, and the professional development that they provide to teachers. States exert influence through their educational policies, assessment and accountability programs, and teacher certification requirements. The nature and quality of national debates involving education influence funding and legislation.

Some individuals link Hispanic education to debates about immigration—both legal and illegal—and to language policy. As a result, debates about what to do to solve a problem turn into debates about deeply held beliefs involving noneducational matters. Such unrelated beliefs interfere with the development of a coherent education policy at all levels. The following is a sampling of beliefs that are obstacles to solving the problem of Hispanic dropout: (a) until we really understand the full extent of the problem, we can do nothing, (b) this is a local school problem that does not lie in the domain of state or other policy levels, (c) there are a few successful programs, but they cannot be scaled up, (d) these are not our children, hence, it is not our problem, (e) the problem is short term and will go away when something else (typically, immigration policy) is taken care of, and (f) serious efforts to solve this problem cost more than the public is willing to spend.

Once again, the Project's findings contradicted such beliefs. For instance, at the most impressive sites that the project visited, language policy and immigration issues had been depoliticized for the cause of education. In many of the districts, it was decided that, in order to educate students effectively, they had to recruit teachers who could communicate with the district's changing clientele. These districts hired teachers and administrative staff who spoke Spanish and who were familiar with Hispanic culture. Their schools developed programs that built on students' native language and their real world knowledge in the various subjects in order to prepare them for higher education, careers, and citizenship. There was no question about using and, in many cases, developing children's native languages and home cultures because this was what the children brought to school with them. Also, there was no question that children would become literate in English and learn to high standards.

Effective schools and programs were very creative in finding new sources of funds and in redeploying existing monies for dropout prevention and educational improvement efforts. Although the Project was impressed by the sheer amount of volunteerism and creative funding employed by every site and program that its members visited, every single program and alternative school was severely underfunded and living a hand-to-mouth existence. Programs had waiting lists. Alternative schools—with their relatively small student to teacher ratios—felt that they were always on the chopping block due to their costs and their districts' ongoing budget problems.

The Project heard from parents, teachers, and other school personnel about contradictory guidelines and policies that are too complex for parents to understand and too time consuming for them to follow. For instance, one district often informed parents about their children's educational problems and possible program options by using a multi page check off form that includes special education, Title 1, bilingual education, English as a second language, sociopsychological and behavioral problems and counseling, achievement, and excessive absence or tardiness. Though convenient for the district, these forms confuse parents who are too overwhelmed to ask for clarification about what the form means. Confronted with such forms, policies, and guidelines, parents feel discouraged from participating in decisions that affect their children's schooling.

District and state policies sometimes provide incentives for schools to ignore student difficulties. For instance, many states provide funding based on a one-time student count that takes place early in the year. Parents and school personnel reported that prior to the student census, schools actively try to keep students. After the schools have their monies, they can simply ignore student tardiness, absence, truancy, and other behaviors that lead to dropout. Not only are there no sanctions when schools rid themselves of such "bad" students, there are positive consequences, especially for overcrowded schools. When students leave overcrowded schools, the benefits include smaller classes, additional resources for the "good" students who remain, improved performance on mandated assessments and on other indicators of school productivity, less stress on the overall climate of the school, and a reduced administrative burden. Moreover, safe in the knowledge that a new crop of students will enter in time for next year's census, the school has no reason to place students into already overcrowded alternative programs.

In addition, districts and states provide incentives for schools to focus solely or mostly on achievement as the major accountability item and then exclude students with limited English proficiency, those in need of special education services, and others with special needs. Schools are thus encouraged to hide many of their lowest achieving students rather than develop their academic abilities.

Districts also tend to overenroll high school students, under the presumption that not all students will come to class. Such a practice sends strong messages to students that they are not expected to attend. Teachers also receive the message that some students are not expected to come to class and that they are not expected to teach all of their enrolled students. It should not be surprising when students and teachers comply with these messages.

Recommendations for districts include the following.

1. ***Districts should inform students and parents of their policies in ways that are clear and easy to understand. Policies should not be overly complex, nor should administrative procedures discourage parental participation. Parents should be warned, well in advance, when their children's behaviors are deemed unacceptable to the district. Districts should enforce their policies fairly and equitably, with strict adherence to due process.***

2. ***States should analyze their policies to remove incentives for schools to ignore and alienate students who experience trouble. State policies should be rewritten with an eye toward encouraging schools to do all they can to retain students. District and state accountability and incentive systems should encourage schools to keep students through high school graduation.***

Report cards of school effectiveness and other efforts by districts and states to hold their schools publicly accountable should not be limited to overall levels of achievement. They should include information about students who are excluded from the tests, student completion rates, attendance statistics, and student enrollment in various tracks. Schools and Hispanic parents should know how Hispanic students are doing.

3. ***In light of the ongoing standards movement, districts and states should develop standards for school conditions, class and school size, and student opportunity to learn. Districts should restructure schools that are too large and impersonal into smaller sized units. Districts' and states' oversight and accountability mechanisms should ensure that Hispanic students participate in the ongoing reform agendas. Reform agendas—especially high stakes testing programs—should be explained to the parents of Hispanic students, and their input solicited. High stakes testing programs should be monitored to ensure that they are implemented equitably so that Hispanic students have a fair opportunity to show what they know and can do.***

4. ***Districts and state education agencies should design comprehensive strategies for dropout prevention that are tied to the states' standards and that take account of students' differing needs at different points in their lives.***

Well-meaning advocates for one or another intervention targeted for a specific age group often seem to promise more than they can accomplish. No single strategy—be it early childhood intervention, Title I, bilingual education, alternative education, curriculum reform, student tutoring and mentoring—can by itself solve the problem of student dropout. The most successful schools visited by the HDP used multiple approaches across pre K-12, and even provided support for older people to return to school to obtain a high school certificate.

5. ***School districts and state education agencies should evaluate currently funded dropout prevention efforts against curricular and student learning standards, and they should provide support for those efforts to continuously improve.***

6. ***As schools become better able to respond to their diverse student populations, programs should be redirected so as to: (a) reconnect students who have been placed on the borderline between success and failure, and (b) provide alternatives for students who prefer to take alternative pathways to a high school credential.***

7. ***Districts and state education agencies should provide lifelong learning opportunities so that people past school age can still acquire a high school credential.***

Society cannot afford to give up on people who, for whatever reasons, have dropped out of school. They should be provided with encouragement and multiple opportunities to return to school and to graduate.

8. ***Districts, state education agencies—indeed, all of society—need to target their resources strategically and to invest more money in helping schools, particularly urban schools, to provide their Hispanic students with opportunities to learn. For example, additional resources could be tied to (a) schools' implementation of programs that have been proven effective, or (b) the expansion and continuous improvement of a promising program that is already in place.***

Because existing resources need to be directed more strategically, schools and districts should carefully evaluate their programs and engage in continuous improvement of their best practices. School districts should redirect monies strategically from programs that are not working (and that seem unable to work) to implement and improve school-based programs that do work.

Schools—especially urban schools in conditions of poverty—need additional resources. There is no way to improve the physical plant of run-down schools, to reduce class size, to target much needed resources, to purchase basic supplies and new books, to reform curriculum, and to provide professional development for teachers without an increased investment in those schools that educate our poorest children.

Districts and school personnel may balk, at first, at the idea of redirecting existing resources. The larger society might have concerns about investing more money than is currently the case in the education of poor Hispanic children. Yet, if monies could be invested strategically in order to provide Hispanics with high-quality educational programs in the first place, then schools and society would save on the long-term costs of their failure to have educated these children properly.

9. Schools, districts, and state education agencies need to develop better management information systems that follow students more accurately and efficiently.

In order to plan, monitor, evaluate, and improve dropout prevention programs, policymakers and school personnel need reliable information about students who leave school. Such information is simply not available. Current policy is focused on students who stay; hence, there are few incentives for schools or districts to worry about dropouts. Without such basic information, it seems impossible to envision the development of any comprehensive set of interventions. Knowing the annual dropout rate of high school students is a start—but ultimately inadequate for planning and monitoring programs. Where possible, districts should follow students from first through twelfth grades.

10. Schools and districts must diversify their teaching workforce to include people with the knowledge, language skills, and backgrounds that will enable them to better connect with Hispanic students and their parents.

Beyond having role models, Hispanic students need to encounter teachers who communicate trust and confidence, who can understand what students are experiencing, and who can guide and support students. Hispanic students reported establishing mutually respectful relationships with Hispanic teachers, with nonHispanic teachers, with volunteers who themselves had dropped out of school but still managed to further their educations, with retired teachers who communicated a sincere confidence in students' intelligence and ability to succeed, and with other adults whose own life experiences validated them in the students' eyes. Such teachers were in short supply in these children's schools.

In addition, schools need teachers who can understand and talk to Hispanic parents. Parents respond best to people they know outside of school such as their neighbors and other parents, to people who treat them with respect, to people who speak Spanish or at least do not denigrate their accents, and to people who clearly show that they care for their children's academic success.

Diversifying the teaching workforce will occur only when people with broad experience, knowledge, and dispositions to work with Hispanic students are recruited into and successfully complete certification programs. Schools of education, school districts, state education agencies, state boards of education, and postsecondary education's governing bodies have important roles in diversifying the teacher workforce.

11. Schools and Colleges of Education should recruit people into the teaching profession who will diversify its ranks. They should develop coursework, practica, student teaching, and

other experiences that will help all preservice teachers to succeed with Hispanic students. The governing bodies of postsecondary educational institutions should require that their faculty be able and willing to prepare teachers to teach Hispanic students.

12. ***Teacher certification bodies should insist that entering teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to work with a diverse student body.***

Because it is within the power of state boards of education to set minimal requirements for entering teachers, they should use those requirements to pressure universities to update their teacher preparation programs so that new teachers will be better able to, in the long run, teach Hispanic students. In addition, the certification bodies should update their rules and regulations so as to encourage the creation of a diverse teacher workforce.

13. ***Bilingual education, the education of Hispanics, and the education of immigrants should be depoliticized.***

Many schools that retained Hispanic students in school relied on bilingual education and incorporated Hispanic culture into their educational processes. But schools certainly can use programs for LEP students to deny such students access to a mainstream education. In other words, bilingual education, English as a second language, and sheltered English instruction are but the means to an end—keeping students in school in one case, denying them educational opportunity in the other. Schools and districts should choose among program models and adopt those characteristics that best suit their unique situations.

The message of the HDP is one of urgency and guarded optimism. Effective schools that have succeeded in not only retaining Hispanic students in school but propelling them toward successful futures do exist, as do imaginative and effective programs. But they are far too few, and they exist with scant resources.

In the chapters that follow, we examine exemplary elementary schools and programs, secondary school programs, and a districtwide approach to combating and solving the persistent Hispanic dropout problem. We ask: How have these exemplary schools and programs succeeded—despite daunting odds? What characteristics do school staff committed to solving the Hispanic dropout problem share? What common beliefs, norms, and values are held in common by these individuals? Which policies, at both the local and state level, have helped develop and sustain these schools and programs?

Many of the recommendations of the HDP are illustrated in case studies of exemplary education. School staff in these successful schools and programs refused to politicize the Hispanic dropout problem. They accepted their students at whatever point they came to school—whether they came from poverty, with less than proficient English, or with other intervening variables often cited for a lack of success in school. But rather than enabling them or disabling them with well-meant sympathy for their life circumstances, these adults prodded and encouraged their students to conceive of productive futures for themselves. They provided numerous mentoring opportunities, both structured and informal, so that these youngsters could benefit from the high expectations and personal warmth of appropriately nurturing relationships with adults. They were available to answer—and to provoke—their students' questions. When students needed extra help with coursework, staff at these schools had a structure to provide support and a core set of values that insisted upon it. Finally, through an almost inexhaustive supply of inventiveness, they refused to allow these students to fail. If one approach was not effective, they regrouped and tried another.

In Chapter Two, we examine a middle school's approach to personalizing the curriculum and how this extended to include students' parents and families in the educational process. In Chapter Three, we discuss a districtwide approach to educating a high percentage of Hispanic students. Chapter Four focuses on three elementary school programs and how they have been enacted at different sites: *Success for All*, the *Helping One Student To Succeed (HOSTS)* program, and the *Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI)* in mathematics program. In Chapter Five, we target two secondary-level programs with evidence of effectiveness: the *AVID* program and the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program. This monograph concludes with Chapter Six, in which we present interviews with four members of the HDP: Project Director Walter G. Secada, Rudolfo Chávez-Chávez, Jeannie Oakes, and Robert Slavin. An extensive bibliography intended to guide the reader to key references in the literature on Hispanic dropout is provided at the end of the monograph.

Endnotes

1. Refer to figure 4, in National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States:* 1994 (NCES 96 863), p. 19. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.

2. Rates of school dropout are measured in three ways. School districts most often report their annual dropout rate, which is computed by counting how many students at a particular grade (for instance, 10th grade) or in a range of grades (for instance, 9th through 12th grades) entered at the start of the school year, and dividing that amount into how many students in the same grade or range of grades quit school entirely during that year. While easy to gather, this statistic fluctuates among schools. In 1994, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported an annual dropout rate from grades 10 through 12 of 4% for white nonHispanic, 6% for black nonHispanic, and 7% for Hispanic students.

A second way of computing the dropout rate, called the *longitudinal* or *cohort* dropout rate, is to follow a cohort of students from when they enter a specific grade to when they graduate from high school, obtain a diploma through some other means, enter the military, get a permanent job, or in some other way indicate that their formal education has ended. Adopted by studies that follow people during significant portions of their lives (National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 [NELS: 88], among others), this method's accuracy depends on the representativeness of its sample and the assumption that no one has dropped out of school before the study began. Cohort dropout rates allow researchers to gather individuals' self-reported reasons for dropping out of school within a short time of their actually doing so. In 1994, the NCES reported dropout rates for a cohort of twelfth-graders who had been followed since the eighth grade: 9% of white nonHispanics, 15% of black nonHispanic, and 18% of Hispanic students had dropped out of school.

The third rate of school dropout, called *status dropout*, is based on census data. Every year, the Census Bureau asks a nationally representative sample of 16-to-24-year-olds—with an oversampling of members of various ethnic minorities—a series of questions about their educational status: if they are enrolled in school or in an alternative diploma program, if they have obtained a diploma or an alternative high school credential, and the like. Most newspaper articles about school dropout rely on census data. According to NCES 1994 data for the U.S., 8% of 16-to-24-year-old whites, 13% black nonHispanics, and 30% Hispanics had left school without a diploma.

3. For actual quotations from the hearings held by the Hispanic Dropout Project, please see *No More Excuses: Final Report of the Hispanic Dropout Project* (1998), United States Department of Education: Washington, DC. <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/used/hdp/index.htm>

CHAPTER TWO

Caring, Community, and Personalization: Lennox Middle School

In order to devise strategies that will reduce the Hispanic dropout problem, we first need to recognize the prevalence of popular perceptions that place blame on the individual, indicting the student or family for laziness, lack of willingness to assimilate into American culture, and reluctance to learn English. A common and pernicious belief condemns Hispanic students for their alienation from school without taking into account the larger social factors that influence their school experiences.

Many educators and the general public believe that outside factors influencing the lives of potential dropouts—whether they include poverty, language difference, or dysfunctional family influences—are simply beyond the purview of schools. This belief contributes to a feeling of helplessness and a lack of school-based strategies to combat the Hispanic dropout rate.

In this chapter, we examine what one exemplary middle school has done to overcome such feelings of helplessness, creating school-based strategies that address these contextual factors. As the Hispanic Dropout Project (1998) and Hugh Mehan (1996, p.10) have detailed, a web of interlocking factors synergize to make dropping out of school much more likely for Hispanic students. These factors include how schools and society respond to students' racial and ethnic identity, gender, socioeconomic status, academic performance, self-concept, family organization, and language fluency.

Nevertheless, as Mehan points out, this combination of factors does not fully explain why Hispanic youth, in particular, continue to drop out of school in disproportionate numbers when compared to the rest of the American population. Instead, he indicts school practices that sort and classify students—practices that alienate students from academic work through curricula that have little relation (let alone relevance) to their everyday life and culture. Longstanding and unquestioned bureaucratic practices that differentiate curricula and curb student access to high-status knowledge and high-quality teaching have insidious effects. Sadly, these practices work in tandem with environmental factors to ultimately disengage many Hispanic students from school entirely and blunt their life chances.

What are schools to do? To answer this question, we feature the strategies employed by Lennox Middle School in Lennox, California. We focus on Lennox Middle School because of their high number of Hispanic students (approximately 95 percent), the socioeconomic variables present in their community that are related to high dropout rates, and because they have a multi-faceted dropout prevention program targeted to Hispanic students. Moreover, Lennox Middle School has a demonstrable record of success in retaining students. During the five-year period between 1991 and 1996 when this study was conducted, less than .05 percent of the total student body dropped out. (No students dropped out in 1991, 1993, and 1994.) In addition, daily attendance rates are high — 96%, student achievement improved between 1991 and 1996 when measured on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) or the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE), and their LEP and FEP (fluent English proficient) students outperformed

LEP/FEP students from other parts of the state. In the spring of 1993, LEP and FEP students were as likely or more likely to score at the middle or upper end of the scoring scale on state performance-based, holistically scored assessments of reading and writing (scores of 3, 4, 5, 6 on a 6-point scale) than other LEP and FEP students in California. (Lennox Middle School had chosen to focus on reading and language arts as especially critical areas because 93% of their students were classified as LEP.)

Another reason we selected Lennox Middle School as our featured school for this chapter is because over half of all Hispanic dropouts leave school before finishing ninth grade, and over a third of Hispanic dropouts have the equivalent of a middle school education. Middle school is an important transition period in these students' lives.

Lennox Middle School is located in Lennox, California—a densely populated community governed by Los Angeles County. Close to Los Angeles International Airport, the community is a port of entry for immigrants from Mexico and Latin America. Lennox Middle School's student population of 1,850 is approximately 95 percent Hispanic, 3 percent African American, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent *other*. The poverty level of students and their families is pronounced: Over 85 percent of students qualified for free breakfast and lunch—and perhaps most tellingly, the majority chose to eat the meals to which they were entitled.

Classified as one of the economically poorest school districts in the state, school staff believe in a concerted, preventive approach to the Hispanic dropout problem—attacking it at a variety of levels and employing a diverse range of strategies. The staff whose perspectives are presented here maintain that a large part of the Hispanic dropout problem would be solved if schools can succeed in bonding students to them and their goals, respecting their culture and issues related to second language learning, and working productively with students' families. Through the voices and successful experiences of Lennox Middle School's principal, assistant principal, and a counselor, we provide specific strategies, ideas, and recommendations for policy and practice.

- Larry Kennedy is principal of Lennox Middle School
- Meg Sanchez is Lennox Middle School's assistant principal, where she holds primary responsibility for curriculum and instruction
- Pam Rector is a counselor with primary responsibilities for Lennox Middle School's college readiness program

These three responded to the following questions: How do you engage students in school? How do you work with Hispanic students and their families in a culturally respectful way? In what ways do you bond students to the academic experience? What works? What requirements must be in place in order for school staff to succeed with such an undertaking? Finally, is it the responsibility of schools alone to deal with a problem so massive? What can policymakers do to encourage sound, effective school-based strategies and programs?

The educational philosophy that permeates Lennox Middle School extends a life rope to students with stunted aspirations and little sense of a future beyond the constraints of their current environment. School staff firmly believe that support must be provided wherever and whenever it is needed. As Larry Kennedy says: "You don't walk students up to the edge of the cliff, push them off, and say, Survive!"

What about the term "at risk"—frequently used to describe similar student populations? How do staff at Lennox Middle School view the term? Do they see it as stigmatizing? Useful? Necessary? "We try hard not to classify our kids that way," Kennedy says thoughtfully. "They do take it personally, and they want to know why they are at risk. I can understand that. To me and to them it has a negative connotation. Instead, we try to work with kids so that they acknowledge that they are minorities but they don't personalize or internalize that knowledge to the point that it is negative. There is tremendous respect at this school for: I am Hispanic. I am smart. I am going to college. "

Reflecting further on the term at risk, Kennedy says, "the term is a 'catch-all' and I don't like it. We use it only when we write a grant or need to explain a grant to staff. But we try hard not to go back and refer to that term."

When Sanchez thinks about the term at risk, she feels compelled to communicate the yearning need of the district's Hispanic students, the not infrequent dysfunctional or destructive home environments, and the high degree of poverty in the community. All of these variables could create a climate of crisis for teachers and staff—and in many schools, contribute to feelings of helplessness and anger. Instead, Lennox Middle School's staff address the need in a strategic, calm, and optimistic manner.

"It is a given that all our kids are at risk in some way," Sanchez notes, "so we talk about the severely at risk to differentiate. The severely at risk are those whose mothers are prostitutes; they live in a hotel and the kids are locked in a bathroom every night. The severely at risk are youngsters whose mothers and fathers are on drugs, whose brothers or sisters are gang members. The severely at risk are kids who can't read or write and have been in school their whole life. There are not many of those, but they do need extra help. We believe they need an adoptive parent, a counseling group, or we need to investigate the home situation a little bit more."

These attitudes and beliefs have infused the intricate web of strategies that staff have devised to propel students past the immediate, seductive dangers of dropping out, gang affiliation, and teen pregnancy. Believing that schools must engage both students and families in a multitude of ways to sufficiently armor and motivate them to stay in school, the staff's efforts include the purely symbolic (covering graffiti with fresh paint overnight to keep the school clean and attractive), the personal (working with youth to develop a sense of personal future), the academic (designing and teaching curricula that are culturally relevant and emphasize high levels of student/teacher interaction), and outreach that is conducted in a manner that is sympathetic to

Hispanic culture (designing programs specifically for parents to increase their awareness and understanding of the school's aims).

One umbrella strategy and belief shared by staff is the need to personalize instruction and programs—an emphasis that radiates through a range of activities. Lennox Middle School restructured itself with intertwined goals: To build a community of caring for students and their families, and to boost student achievement. Teams of three teachers work with approximately 90 students in an interdisciplinary approach to instruction at grades six, seven, and eight. These teams are deliberately structured so that flexibility is maintained and teacher choice is respected.

"We have one group of three teachers," Kennedy observes, "that has followed their seventh-graders to eighth grade (for two years). Another group is talking about keeping their students for three years." But instead of mandating that teacher teams retain the same students for the three middle school grades, teachers can choose other arrangements. "Different teachers have different interests," Kennedy explains. "Some prefer sixth-graders and like to nurture them as they come in from the fifth grade. Other teachers like to work with older kids. Having teachers select, to a great degree, who they will work with on a team and what grade levels they will teach has worked well to date."

Although most, if not all, of Lennox's students could be termed in danger of dropping out, some students seem especially vulnerable to leaving school early. One key program nurtures these youngsters by pairing them with school staff to provide supportive relationships otherwise missing from their lives. This "Adopt-a-Student" program enlists all school staff—including secretaries, aides, teachers, custodians—urging each staff member to adopt one or two students.

The requirements for staff who participate are fairly extensive—which helps ensure that the program is not patronizing or mechanistic. "We ask that they touch base with that kid every single day. During the course of the week, they should spend an hour with them—and they can spend longer periods of time," Kennedy explains. "Many people will take them to movies on the weekend, or to the beach, or camping, or sometimes have an impromptu picnic right here on school grounds." If students are not in school, their staff partner checks on them—even intervening to ensure that they get to school. "Kids take this kind of attention seriously," Kennedy assures us. "Programs like these allow kids who are outside the loop, who have been failures academically, to see some reason for existing or being successful in school. They see that someone *does* care about them."

Meg Sanchez agrees. "Kids would much rather be here in school than on the street," she emphasizes, "because this is where it is happening. This is where people really care about them—and they know it. We have kids who come back to see us from the high schools and the one theme that runs throughout their conversation is that they (at the high school) do not care about us the way you did."

This kind of caring isn't some trendy form of psychobabble or an excuse to ease up on academic demands, Sanchez points out. Instead, this climate of caring permeates the entire school's approach to curriculum and instruction. It affects their teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention—and it shapes how school staff deal with significant issues Hispanic students often bring to school.

Engaging Students Academically

Engaging students in school—including students not in imminent peril of dropping out—is no small task. How do staff approach the challenge? At the outset, instruction is much more lively and noisy than in many schools, Sanchez says. "We are very much against the teacher who does nothing but lecture. That turns kids off. We use a lot of instructional conversation, a lot of cooperative learning. If I walk into a classroom and it is silent, I get very nervous. But if I go into a classroom and the teacher is on the sidelines, all the kids are in groups of four and are arguing about a novel, that is what we like to see."

An extremely strong program of bilingual education—combined with careful teacher selection—is imperative for a population of Hispanic students, she says. "We select the teachers who teach ESL very carefully based on what we know about them and their ability to teach ESL. There are so many levels within ESL: Kids who talk faster, kids who are in a different place, kids who arrive late in the year. We never put all ESL kids together on one team. Instead, they are mixed in with English readers in teams of 90 to 120 students."

Much of the literature taught at Lennox Middle School is written by Latino/a or Latino/a American writers, and the largely bilingual staff fluctuate easily between English and Spanish in everyday speech. "We do a lot of code switching, but not while teaching," Sanchez emphasizes.

How are other cultures brought into a school with such a heavy emphasis on Hispanic culture? "We don't have a large African American population," Sanchez responds, "but we have a lot of African American teachers. We also have a small population of Tongan kids. We emphasize justice and peace and tolerance. These are big issues at this school, just a part of the regular classroom discourse." As an example, teachers bring up current events for class debate and discussion, such as the wave of church burnings in the South that took place in 1996.

Kennedy sees a clear but unanticipated benefit as a result of the change to teaming: Improved relationships with parents. "We have conferences with the three teachers on a team and a student, sometimes with the student and parent, and ask: 'Why are you not turning in your homework?' Maybe they don't have a notebook. Maybe they need a backpack. So we get them a notebook and a backpack. We tell them: 'You are going to be here and have your homework.' Then we set up a system to monitor that. Part of it is arm-twisting, and the other part is seeing that the kid goes away knowing that 'Those people at school care and are going to get me if I don't do it.'"

The familiar complaint that such an extended role for school staff is not the school's responsibility is not heard at Lennox Middle School, Kennedy says. "We do not lay the responsibility on the parent by saying, 'If he would just come to school,' or 'If she would only do this or that.'" Instead, responsibility for student achievement and engagement in school is shared. "In this kind of support system, kids don't fall through the cracks," he observes.

Recruitment of New Staff

In order to engage students academically, Lennox Middle School begins with definite notions about how teachers must work with students—and these beliefs strongly influence their hiring and teacher evaluation. "We must have teachers who care about children and who respect them," Sanchez says firmly. "During the hiring process, we find that one telling way of discovering candidates' attitudes is to pose a scenario in which a student blows up at the teacher in the classroom. We want to know how the prospective teacher would handle the situation."

A teacher who immediately would discipline the student or send him or her to the office is not what the school wants, Sanchez maintains. "That teacher's first instinct is not to care about the kid but to care about his or her own status in the classroom. Instead, we want a teacher who will calm the student down and talk quietly with him or her outside the classroom—not one who turns the situation into an issue of power and control and ego."

While interviewing prospective teachers, staff also ask candidates which five rules they would choose to govern their classroom. "Some people have rules that students can't stand up; they can't speak without raising their hands. That is not what we want here," she emphasizes. "We want a community of learners. We want a place where the classroom is the student's home for two hours at a time. It is just as much the student's place as our place as teachers."

Once teachers are hired, they are monitored to make sure they maintain a respectful stance toward students. "We have three teachers who are not coming back next year," Sanchez says bluntly. "Two of them are not bad instructors, but they are not sensitive enough to our kids. They are both fluently bilingual. Other schools would keep them; they would not even think about letting them go. But because they model behaviors that aren't respectful to the kids—such as a tone of impatience—we won't ask them to return."

Although these attitudes toward teacher hiring and retention may sound much tougher than policies in many schools, Sanchez emphasizes that Lennox's climate is not strict and punitive, but instead collegial and committed to students. She credits the staff for enormous dedication to their work—and remembers how teacher attitudes toward Hispanic students have evolved in a positive direction.

"In 1979 and 1980, the population in Lennox was shifting rapidly from Anglo to Latino. Some of the old-timers who had been here for 15 to 20 years were complaining: 'I don't know if I can deal with these kids. You just can't talk to these parents.' But as soon as we got new teachers and some of the old-timers retired, the ones who didn't retire heard this new sensitivity. They began to be called [down for] some of their comments—and they began to change. Currently, we have a very powerful group of people who have subject-specific skills and people who are extremely nurturing and caring."

In 1996, the Lennox School District required that staff be bilingual to ensure that staff could communicate with students and their families. "We have a strict and stringent hiring policy because of the ethnic makeup of the students," Kennedy states. Although he is not bilingual and would not be hired under the current policy, Kennedy supports it wholeheartedly, showing his support for Hispanic culture outside school through participation in community celebrations and events. "For instance, I wouldn't think of missing the Cinco de Mayo festival," he says. "That kind of participation is so appreciated by the parents, the kids, and the older kids who are coming back. This is their community, and you are sharing it. A tremendous amount of respect goes with that."

Building a Sense of Future

Another critical strategy is building and extending a sense of a personal future to students who may come from families where graduation from the eighth grade is the ultimate educational accomplishment. Signals of potential dropout emerge early, and are taken seriously by school staff.

What warnings indicate that dropping out looms on a student's personal horizon? "We see it in different ways related to gender," Kennedy says. "We see girls taking a back seat to boys in class. Part of this is related to the growth cycle they are going through. We also see girls beginning to date older boys or dressing in short skirts, bold colors, and heavy makeup. We also see students quit doing their homework and get negative attention by being the class clown. They come late to class, they don't get up on time, they mess around with other kids in a nonconstructive ways."

Rector notes that congested, compressed living conditions common to Lennox's impoverished urban neighborhood play a role in teen pregnancy, simply because they facilitate interaction between girls and older men. If a girl is already alienated by and disengaged from her school experiences, with little or no sense of a personal future, she is much more likely to choose pregnancy—usually with a man well into his twenties. Parents may give tacit approval to these relationships, if the men are employed and seen as good providers.

For all those reasons, school staff concentrate on eventual graduation from college as one way for students to see a productive future for themselves beyond what they may witness around them in their neighborhood. "We have concentrated heavily on the college futures of the kids for the last eight years," Kennedy says. "At first it was difficult to convince the parents, but we now feel we have turned a corner."

Why might Hispanic parents resist the idea of college? According to Kennedy and Rector, many believe that contributing economically to the family is more beneficial than extended education. Even high school can be viewed as unnecessary when poverty is a grinding daily reality.

Rector points out that overcoming the belief that a college education is either out of reach or unnecessary is not an easy task for school staff, but they are encouraged by student response to the college readiness programs they have developed. "The average level of education for our parents is fourth grade," she explains. "For many parents, eighth-grade graduation is a big deal. It means you have really made it." With obvious empathy, she adds, "High school is a bonus, and college is a dream."

Other parents, she states, expect no less than college—but uneven expectations, coupled with the press of severe poverty and previous distasteful school experiences, combine to make many Hispanic youth feel shut out of school. In these cases—which are far too frequent—youth drop out and get a low-level, dead-end job. "They feel successful because they are earning some money and helping their moms. They are not getting what they need out of school, so they get it out of work. Now they have new shoes. They have something to show."

However, Kennedy says that Lennox Middle School counters the desire to "have things now" with a heavy emphasis on college as something accessible to its students, both academically and financially. "Counseling staff," Kennedy notes, "work with a program called *College Readiness*, which pairs students with Hispanic college students who come in and tutor our kids two times a week. During the course of the year, our students also go to the college campus and spend an overnight. When they come back, they say: 'I can do this too.' And of course, their college tutor has been telling them that they could."

Another college readiness program pairs students with Latino college students in the area, providing them with supportive mentors and role models. "We have a program called *El Espejo*," Rector explains, "which means 'The Mirror.' It is a tutorial program with Latino college students who come and work with our Latino kids. The idea is that young kids look in the mirror and hopefully see themselves in the future; the college kids look in the mirror and hopefully see themselves as they were."

Although students' initial suspicion of the program needed to be overcome, El Espejo has blossomed. During the 1996-97 school year, the program utilized 65 tutors, who worked with 120 students, volunteering their time. "The college kids bond with our kids because everybody is Latino; everybody knows the struggle," Rector says. "We work with parents through in-services that focus on getting the kid ready to go to college, what scholarships are available, and telling them not to be afraid, to carry on, that they can make it."

Entrance into El Espejo is determined mostly by teacher recommendations of students who either have college potential but lack role models in their families, or students who suffer such impoverished family backgrounds that the tutoring provides them some positive attention. "We have many boys without mentors in their lives, so we match them up with college guys," Rector says.

Focusing on college in the middle school years, she believes, is one way to inoculate students against cultural insensitivity, low expectations, and the pull of outside forces that make dropping out an alluring possibility. "We are the last chance they get to hear the message loud and clear. That message is: 'It doesn't matter what color you are. It doesn't matter what your money source is. You can go to college—and you can finish college.' Getting to know actual college students from similar backgrounds helps make the idea much more tangible. When our kids saw that these college kids were just like them—only older—it made them realize that college is for them. It is not just for white, entitled people."

Lennox Middle School students also visit college campuses in the vicinity, go on tours, and return with college memorabilia. Kennedy remarks, "This may seem frivolous, but they have never been there, never seen it, never done it. By doing these things, they start to get a picture that they really can do it or it really can happen to them."

School staff insist on taking the long view. "When we set goals," Rector explains, "we talk about where we see ourselves in five years. Since they have been on campus, they can see themselves in a dorm, with school posters on the wall, with a roommate, studying chemistry. If they can picture it, I think they can get there. But to say: 'Yes, college is important but never to experience it will not make them work for it.'"

Outreach to Parents

Understanding and respecting Hispanic culture is imperative for educators, Rector believes. "Schools often don't understand the culture that the kids and parents come from. They have parent programs at night and only in English. We can't do that because a lot of our parents walk. If we have something at 7:30 at night, nobody can go because they are not going to walk at night in this neighborhood." Instead, they hold parent functions at 5:30 or 6 p.m. "We always have food," Rector asserts. "Parents feel good about bringing the food in and making their contributions. I think that in this way, we value parents. We make them feel like we need them—because we do."

Lennox Middle School places a heavy emphasis on the practical, on grappling with poverty in productive ways, Rector continues. "We have computer classes for parents. We have nutrition classes, because they tend to shop locally in markets that overcharge them for everything. They learn it is probably worth it to get out of the neighborhood to buy bulk groceries since they live in such big families."

Rector also works with a core group of parents who will educate other parents in a peer approach—drawing them into the school and its goals. "We hope that this group will be our link to the parents with whom we are not in contact. Part of this is, again, that sense of bringing them in and having them feel accountable for the whole school. These parents are looking at the huge picture of what it means to be a parent, what it means to have a kid in this school, and what they want for their kids in the school."

She adds with some poignancy, "What we in schools haven't done well is clear. We haven't realized the potential that parents offer us because they are bright people who don't speak this language—but not infrequently, many were important people or held important positions in their own country but came here and now can't do that. They are underemployed. There is some shame in that—in cleaning rooms in a hotel because that is the best you can get."

Do staff ever rail against the pressures upon them to contend with forces that many schools shrug off as outside their control? "Not at all," Sanchez says, somewhat fiercely. "It goes back to caring about kids. How can you turn your back on any issue that affects them? You can't."

Recommendations

- Establish a sense of community and an atmosphere of inclusion in the ethos of the school. This can be accomplished through the use of teacher teams who work cooperatively on curriculum and instruction, through flexible student assignments to teacher teams, and through outreach programs that include the student's immediate and extended family.

- Make instruction proactive rather than passive and didactic, placing a premium on cooperative learning, a high degree of interaction between students and teachers, and the appropriate use of ESL instruction.

- Provide flexibility in rules governing hiring and retention of teachers. In some cases, this may require exemptions from rules that prevent schools from hiring teachers with qualities uniquely needed in specific settings. It also may require transferring teachers who are unable to fulfill particular school expectations.

- Establish a district policy that encourages or requires the hiring of bilingual teachers who are respectful of Hispanic language and culture to better communicate the goals and aims of the school to students and their families.

- Develop, maintain, and continuously evaluate programs that further a sense of personal future for Hispanic students, such as college readiness programs and mentoring programs with school staff and college students.

- Target parents and extended families for extensive outreach, including afterschool programs (e.g., computer classes, and consumer economics) tailored to their needs and conducted in both Spanish and English.

- Avoid language that serves to label and distance students and their families from school staff, such as extensive and thoughtless use of the term at risk.

CHAPTER THREE

Emphasis on Equity: The Calexico School District's Secondary-Level Strategies for Hispanic Youth

In this chapter, we turn our attention to secondary-level curricular strategies that have been successful in significantly diminishing the dropout rate of Hispanic students, and accomplishing a variety of other worthwhile goals. As Rudolfo Chávez-Chávez (1996) and Hugh Mehan (1996) emphasize, schools play an important part in filtering and sorting all students—regardless of ethnicity or race—into their eventual slots in society. For Hispanic students, who frequently carry the additional punishing baggage of poverty and prejudice, such sorting practices can result in severely truncated futures, low-paying jobs, and a pervasive lack of hope for the future.

Sorting practices, along with destructive, stigmatizing labels, are a primary reason that so many Hispanic students drop out of school with feelings of alienation and low self-worth (Chávez-Chávez, 1996; Mehan, 1996). Clearly, it is especially critical that these students encounter teachers and classrooms in tune with their educational needs—and who respect and value their native language and culture.

In a time when competing and conflicting mandates from a variety of national, state, and district sources overwhelm school staff—and time and resources are limited—knowing what to do becomes especially problematic. Poor students, students whose proficiency in English is less than ideal, or students who lack knowledge of American society, too frequently face a "dumbed-down" curriculum that leaves them and their teachers dissatisfied and unsuccessful.

Chávez-Chávez (1996) maintains that "knowing how to do the right thing" often translates into schools following unquestioned educational practices that force Hispanic students into a narrow educational box within which they cannot succeed. Estranged from their teachers and classmates, these students are, in fact, pushed out of school. Subsequently, they face futures of low-paying, dead-end jobs.

Another contributing factor to the high Hispanic dropout rate, Chávez-Chávez argues, is the degree to which Hispanic students suffer in schools that disparage and marginalize their culture and language. Rather than working with and celebrating the language, culture, and richness of ethnic experiences that Hispanic students bring with them into the classroom, many schools avoid even acknowledging these cultural resources. Uncomfortable with diversity, too frequently schools view their role as miniature melting pots—places where English is the only language that is valued, and academic success means that the native language and culture must be abandoned. Unfortunately, this approach often leads to limited student literacy in both English and Spanish—and alienation not only from mainstream American society, but also from the culture and family of origin.

School experiences do not need to be punishing and alienating. Instead, as demonstrated by the experience of the Calexico School District, which is featured in this chapter, school staff can build programs based on the needs of their students, fashioning challenging educational experiences that connect students to school and to adults. As Calexico demonstrates, high standards for conduct and academic performance operate to the advantage of students—when they are accompanied by the refusal to give up on those who are at the highest risk of dropping out.

The Calexico School District is located in Calexico, California, a community with a population of approximately 25,000. Calexico hugs the Mexican border near Mexicali, which has a population of close to a million and is the closest large city. Calexico's demographics typify those of many communities with high Hispanic dropout rates. Fifty-one percent of its 6,856 students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, approximately 30 percent are the children of migrants, the average household income is under 12,000, the unemployment rate is 25-35%, and approximately 80 percent of its K-12 students are classified as LEP. As in many communities throughout the United States, substance abuse and gangs are burgeoning threats.

Despite these factors, the Calexico School District holds a fistful of national awards and recognition for the programs it has developed to meet the special needs of its students. Calexico's secondary schools led the district's transformation in the late 1960s with a pioneering bilingual education program. In 1996, the dropout rate for Calexico High School was only 2.4 percent; it was in the fourth year of an ambitious restructuring plan that provided strong academics and emphasized future career possibilities for all students. The class of 1996 graduated 387 students—15% entered four-year universities, 64% enrolled in the local community college, 4% enrolled in trade or technical schools, and 8.5% entered the military.

Aurora Alternative High School, Calexico's continuation school and last hope for students at the highest risk of dropping out, refuses to give up on its students. Instead, Aurora holds high academic and behavior standards for all students, working with them and with their families to build a sense of social and personal responsibility. The development of strong, workable plans for future education or entry into the workforce postgraduation is an integral part of the curriculum, as is a project-oriented approach to learning.

Calexico's insistence on high-quality bilingual education, its continuous self-assessment and refinement of existing programs and strategies, and its philosophy that problems are collective rather than individual, contribute to the success of its students—many of whom return to Calexico to become teachers in the district. In this chapter, selected district and secondary-level administrative and instructional staff discuss how the Calexico School District attained its present, impressive status through a districtwide and community emphasis on strong, research-driven bilingual programs, bilingual staff, rigorous academic and behavioral standards for all students, heterogeneous grouping, and curricular practices that enlist students in the educative process. The staff listed below believe that these practices prepare students to deal with prejudice, teach them how to be successful academically, and build a sense of self-efficacy that will carry them into productive futures.

- Emily Palicio is Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services for the Calexico School District.
- Harry Pearson is Principal of Calexico High School.

- Patrick Peake is Principal of Aurora Alternative High School.
- Juan Orduna is a mathematics and computer science teacher at Calexico High School.
- Gilbert Mendez is a Title I teacher at Calexico High School.

When Emily Palicio, Calexico's Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, looks back at the Calexico schools she saw when she arrived in the district as a teacher in 1969, she remembers a time of low expectations, dismal student performance, and scant understanding of students' native language and culture. Despite Calexico's proximity to Mexico and its constant influx of immigrant students, not only were bilingual teachers virtually nonexistent, immigrant and LEP students rarely reached college or achieved even a modicum of academic success.

Teachers, Palicio recalls, didn't expect LEP or non-English-speaking students to succeed in academic work. Primary instructional strategies were remediation: an instructional pace slowed to a crawl, and plenty of drill. Not surprisingly, these approaches failed to yield positive results.

Palicio still remembers her frustration. "I knew there had to be another way to teach," she says. "I knew the kids were not dumb, yet we lowered everything because they didn't know the language. We had low expectations and consequently students functioned at a low level. We did what everyone else in the country was doing and as a result, we produced limited bilinguals—students who were limited in English and limited in Spanish. The lack of Hispanic staff was a serious impediment to academic success for Calexico students. In my school, there were only two Hispanic teachers. I was one of them."

Palicio credits the development of a strong, research-based bilingual education program—in tandem with a commitment to hiring well-qualified bilingual staff—as the foundation for Calexico's shift to high expectations and academic rigor for all students. In fact, bilingual programs served as the catalyst for substantive reform throughout the Calexico schools.

Hiring Bilingual Staff

The presence of bilingual staff throughout the district provides practical and symbolic testimony that students' native language and culture are valued, Palicio explains. It also serves to reflect the district's "value position" that staff respect and understand students' cultural and linguistic background. "If students come to our schools and are told they can only speak one language," she points out, "what we have done is invalidate what they have learned at home. Until students transition to English, they will have much higher self-esteem in bilingual programs, working with bilingual staff, than if they had been told that their language was wrong."

Palicio adds, "Today, 85% of our elementary school teachers are bilingual [and] approximately 40% of our high school teachers are bilingual. All our elementary school principals are bilingual [and] one of our two junior high school principals is bilingual as well."

Harry Pearson, Calexico High School's principal, presents another dimension of the district's bilingual staff. "We are experiencing a phenomenon," he notes with obvious pride. "Over the past 15 years, students who have come through our program and graduated from college have come home to teach—and they are very successful as teachers. They want to give back to the community."

Commitment to Bilingual Programs

The district's emphasis on bilingual education also has had a profound influence on its educational philosophy. When Title VII funding first made it possible to establish bilingual education programs, the Calexico School District wrote a proposal to solicit funds for a secondary-level program, rather than an elementary program, partly because the proposal writers recognized the potency of community sentiments against bilingual education at the elementary level.

"When you live in a border community where the primary language is Spanish," Palicio explains, "parents believe they are sending their kids to school to learn English. Why would we teach them in Spanish?"

Carefully basing its pilot bilingual program on the work of key researchers in bilingual education such as James Cummins, Steve Krashen, and Tracy Terrell, the district witnessed a shift in public attitudes in a relatively short period of time. Parents began to see LEP students who entered the Calexico schools in junior high or high school attend college—"within the first generation," Palicio emphasizes. This fast track to academic success impressed parents, who realized that before the advent of bilingual programs, students who went to college were almost exclusively middle class, second and third generation Hispanics.

Palicio notes that the high school program was the predecessor of the bilingual program that Calexico now has, which is "a true bilingual program," she adds. This pioneering project, *El CID*, broke new ground at Calexico by mixing students who were proficient- or native-English-speakers with students whose primary language was Spanish. Later, when the district added its elementary bilingual program, its progress was informed by the way in which it had implemented the secondary bilingual program.

"The elementary program truly was a bilingual program," Palicio says, "although the secondary program was definitely the forerunner for it." The program, which gradually encompassed the entire district, incorporated a Spanish-as-a-second-language (SSL) component, rarely encountered in bilingual programs, targeted toward students who had lost their proficiency in Spanish.

Teachers team-taught in the program: one teacher as the English model, another as the Spanish model. But success was far from certain. Lack of commitment to the program inside the district was an ongoing source of tension. "Most of the teachers were not bilingual," Palicio says. "We had a battle on our hands. Obviously, there was jealousy because we had funds from Title VII that the other program didn't have. We were embarking on a whole new philosophy, and it was not a popular philosophy. But suddenly, teachers working in the program saw a difference, and parents saw a difference too."

Long-held staff attitudes about the capabilities of LEP students changed dramatically as a direct result of bilingual programming. "We saw our students as active learners," she says. "The kids who never participated began to participate. Suddenly they could read, because Spanish is a very easy, phonetic language in which to develop literacy. That created an excitement in all of us."

Harry Pearson, Calexico High School's principal, sees district commitment to bilingual education as a primary reason students stay in school. "At the high school, we have a very strong English Language Development (ELD) program," he explains. "Students receive this language development at the same time they receive their four subjects in their primary language or in sheltered English. It is possible for students to take the same curriculum that other students have in their primary language and move all the way through the system to graduation—which is a main factor in keeping many students in school."

However, all students must pass a proficiency test in English and complete a senior project to fulfill graduation requirements at Calexico High School. Since late-entry immigrants graduate with varying degrees of English language proficiency, they often continue their educations at the local community college where they further develop their English language skills.

Palicio believes that district commitment to bilingual education also validates parents and families. "These programs mean that parents can become involved in the literacy of their child. We also work to reach a nontraditional population in nontraditional ways. Our parents, by and large, didn't graduate from high school so they don't know how the system works. We have to demystify the system and make it accessible to them."

Making the system accessible translates to an intensely practical approach that emphasizes academic achievement and the importance of college. Almost 100 percent of the district's clerical staff and instructional aides are bilingual. "This provides parents with better access in their interactions with schools," Palicio notes. "They know they can go there and somebody is going to understand what they have to say."

The insistence on college and education after graduation means that parents are informed by school staff what courses their children need to take for college admission. When students reach the college admissions process, they and their families are aided by counselors, if necessary. "They assist them in filling out financial aid applications if needed," she says. "Another system might say: 'If you want to go to college you come in and show up on Monday at 3 p.m.' That is not going to work because the parents do not know what they have to do."

A Culture of Continuous Refinement

The district's bilingual education program served as the starting point for its commitment to continuous refinement of existing programs. "It has been a transformation," Palicio says with gentle irony, "for 25 years. The difference at this district is that we have been into research and experimentation."

The district also has encouraged—and pushed—collaboration. "It may sound like a stereotype," Palicio acknowledges, "but bilingual teachers, by nature, are more collaborative in their approach. Moving to team teaching, therefore, wasn't a big deal for us. But in a traditional program where teachers see the classroom as their domain, it is much more difficult to break down those barriers."

Team teaching brought about a collective sense of responsibility throughout the district, an ethos that problems were to be shared rather than handed off to someone else. "That changes the culture of the school," Palicio emphasizes. "In addition, our Title VII funds allowed us to bring in the best staff development. Because Title VII demanded an evaluation of our program, we were able to follow students longitudinally and see how they were doing. "This longitudinal evaluation allowed us to look closely at what we were doing and what we needed to do differently. The funds provided us the release time to reflect about what we were doing and to collaboratively come up with solutions."

What about staff who resisted collaboration? Who didn't buy into bilingual education and the new philosophy that the schools needed to adapt to the needs of their students? Who rejected the district commitment to students' languages and cultures?

Attrition was helpful, Palicio notes. As older teachers gradually retired, the district had an opportunity to replace them with teachers who were willing to progress in the direction set by the district.

The district also demonstrated its commitment to the needs of its students. At one time, the district faced the possibility of teacher layoffs due to a projected shortfall in district funds. During the layoff process, the district made a decision that the layoffs would be based on student needs rather than teacher seniority. This decision—which saved bilingual certified teachers—sent a message through the community that the needs of the children of Calexico would come first in the priorities of the district. Although the layoffs were based on an administrative error and never occurred, the message retained its power, Palicio notes.

"The resistance was no longer so obvious," she recalls. "And when the push in the 1980s was to get kids into English as soon as possible, we were able to use that as leverage to include all of our teachers in training for LEP students. That sent the message that all our students needed assistance and support in becoming proficient in English. We were able to train the monolingual English teachers as well as the bilingual teachers." Another obstacle vanished. "Now, we were talking about our children, not those children," she says.

Curricular Practices For All Students

In keeping with its philosophy of continuous refinement and improvement, Calexico High School and Aurora Continuation High School received one-year restructuring planning grants and five-year demonstration grants from the state of California four years ago—which has resulted in a revamped curriculum at the secondary level. Tenth-graders at Calexico High School take the same college preparatory curriculum in separate academies. All classes within the academies are heterogeneously grouped, and students are housed with a cluster of four teachers (English/language arts, science, social science, and foreign languages) who work collaboratively with their colleagues from mathematics and physical education to meet the goals of each academy.

Eleventh- and twelfth-graders are housed in four career path institutes and have the choice of fifteen career path majors from which to select. The institutes focus on investigations in engineering and technology, the environment and society, the visual and performing arts, and business and economics. "The important part of the institutes," Pearson states, "is that we are getting kids to focus on careers in a way that is meaningful. We are not looking just at amassing 220 credits for graduation from high school, but instead at a diploma that says they have some skills that will take them into the workplace."

Calexico staff are quick to acknowledge that they need to increase the numbers of LEP students in advanced math courses. Juan Orduna, a Calexico graduate who returned to teach mathematics and computers at Calexico High School, comments that although students are grouped heterogeneously, mathematics remains naturally tracked as courses become progressively more difficult. "We continue to work on this," he says. "Some LEP students felt intimidated by the courses because they were afraid of the language barrier. But, I believe that math is such a universal language that it has its own vocabulary. The language barrier can be downplayed or eliminated."

Orduna doesn't hesitate to switch into Spanish while teaching one of his calculus or math analysis classes if he sees that students are stumbling because of difficulty with English. "The concept is the important part," he says, "not the language. I am a believer in success," he adds. "When you work with students and encourage them, you watch for success because it will then create more success. But," he states emphatically, "I am also a believer in challenging students. I have developed a little culture within my classroom where kids feel free to come in and get extra help. Sometimes kids come in at 6 PM, form little study groups, and do their work. Others come at 4:30 after their activities."

Obviously, this type of culture demands a willingness from Orduna to be available on an extended schedule for his students—something to which he is committed. "The trick to getting kids to learn is making them believe in themselves," [to believe] "Yes, you are somebody and you can accomplish your dream." He clarifies pragmatically, "But then you have to make it possible for them to accomplish their dream. One way is to be around and help them on a regular basis."

One of Orduna's colleagues, Gilbert Mendez, works with students at Calexico High School—those considered at the highest risk of dropping out—in a computer-assisted program of instruction called the *Academic Support* class. "Part of the day they work with four teachers in the Academies," he observes, "and part of the day directly with me on writing, reading, or another skill. They work 20 minutes at a time on the computer and the rest of the time either with my aide or with me. The computer time is tightly structured."

Mendez continues, "Keeping students in school is one thing. Keeping them interested is another. For that reason, I try different approaches. Some things are more successful than others, so it is necessary to continue to try new things. If we want to make education relevant, we have to tie it in with students' lives, conflicts, and ideas—not remain in the abstract."

Another important thread in the fabric of Calexico's success is the presence of Hispanic role models. As Orduna says, "Students that I work with don't see their ethnicity or their culture as a barrier to success. Many of our faculty, especially in the math department, are Hispanic. Our kids have grown up with role models. They have been taught to eliminate the view that their ethnicity or culture will interfere with their success. Plus, here are these folks who have succeeded. They are Hispanic—and yet they are as American as they can be. This reinforces the idea," Orduna declares, "that to succeed is great."

High Standards and "Back Doors" for Potential Dropouts

Exemplifying Calexico's stance that it will not abandon its students—no matter how difficult their problems—is the philosophy of its continuation high school, a philosophy that has developed over the past 24 years. Aurora Alternative High School came into being following state legislation that mandated continuation high schools in districts that had high school graduating classes that exceeded 100 students.

Patrick Peake, Aurora's principal, is quick to point out that some continuation high schools are little more than "holding pens" for students identified as problems. Much less frequently, there are schools like Aurora—which emphasize personal and social responsibility, high standards, and a tough discipline system. "In the beginning, we had about 25 students," Peake says. "A good number of those were heroin and drug addicts. Today, the enrollment is over 150 and many more students come to us because of the need for a nontraditional academic environment."

The rise in enrollment is not a negative sign, Peake maintains, because these are the students who would have slipped out of the system in years past. Instead, they now come to Aurora for a variety of reasons including discipline problems, lack of academic success, or substance abuse. But the most common reason for coming to Aurora is that a student cannot accommodate to the size of the regular high school or get along with other students and with teachers. "Kids get disenchanted with the bigger system because it is big," Peake notes. "The system cannot hold that many high-risk kids without developing some sort of individual approach for them. In our case, we used the continuation school as a key to that approach. "

Peake makes it clear that a shrewd understanding of adolescents guides all instructional and curricular decisions at the school. "Because our students have usually had difficulty in getting along in the system, we stress the development of a personal/social conscience. Students spend three quarters of the year in heterogeneous groups, but they are not placed with their friends."

Aurora's students could easily be written off as hopeless, Peake emphasizes, and rejected by an educational system into which they don't fit. Instead, Aurora refuses to give up on any student. There is no permanent exit from the school short of violence—"a weapon, for example," he explains. "That would be the one exception because of the safety of the campus. Our philosophy is that there is no exit. We always provide a back door for students so that they can return to the school."

Aurora's day program focuses on three learning outcomes: personal/social responsibility, communication, and thinking skills. "We focus kids on the three factors that we have found to be the most necessary for them to be successful in life, and we found those through interviewing members of our community." How rigorous is this alternative program? "Each semester, they must focus on one of the learning outcomes, always returning to personal/social responsibility."

Each of the three learning outcomes is tied to content standards, Peake explains. "Their projects have to focus on the particular content area in question and we have a checklist of elements of the standard that they cover in their particular project. "How rigorous is it?" Peake asks rhetorically. "It is not close to matching the California curriculum standards. On the other hand, at graduation our students produce a portfolio of material that shows they have investigated in depth these areas and have learned to give an oral presentation to adults with confidence. They also have developed action plans for themselves, which means that they must enroll in college, technical school, or [have] made the contacts they need to make with people who will see that they have a future. If they do not do this, they do not graduate."

Students who cannot adjust to Aurora's day program are able to enter its Service Recovery Night School Program. "In this program," Peake says, "students are not allowed to come to the day school because they haven't been able to adjust to it. But they must attend two nights per week for two and a half-hours each night. During the day, three hours a day they have to do a service project in the community, usually in a school, the hospitals, preschools, or special education centers.

Students earn the right to come back into Aurora's day program through completion of service hours, a journal, and attendance at night school. "They are not, however, allowed to be with the mainstream," Peake observes, "which as teenagers is their main need. Therefore they are motivated to work their way back into the program."

When students enter Aurora, they and their parents go through training simultaneously, Palicio says. "If you change the student and you don't change the atmosphere at home, it doesn't work. And if you change the home atmosphere and not the student, it doesn't work either. We were able to see that, so we provided parents the support they needed to be proactive in monitoring their kids. We use a project that the L. A. Police Department uses with hard-core kids. It is a very structured program with six sessions on big issues, such as gangs, alcohol and substance abuse, suicide and emotional problems, and communicating with kids. The next six sessions focus on developing a discipline plan and forming support groups to help implement that plan."

This program helps parents see which of their behaviors enable their children to become behavioral problems in school. "If the kids are wearing gang clothes," Palicio says, "the parent gets rid of those clothes. Once the parents are in control, the kids see they can't get away with those behaviors. And once the kids go through the continuation school and are in control of themselves, they see that they can do something with their lives. "It doesn't work with everybody," she adds, "but it works with a lot of people. Even the ones for whom it doesn't work see that the quality of their lives improves. Some take baby steps; some take giant steps. We tell parents that we want their kids to come back, but we want them to come back and succeed, not come back and do what they did before."

Peake makes it clear that although staff maintain a warm and caring relationship with students, this relationship has evolved over the years to avoid what he terms "enabling." He admits that his own attitude has toughened, but in a caring way. I used to think we were there to love the kids," he explains, "spend some time with then, and then graduate them in an unfair system. I used to think that the system was the thing that destroyed them."

New, stiff guidelines on behavior and a policy of "tough love" make that attitude a thing of the past. "As one example, we have a zero tardiness policy," Peake points out. "If a kid is 15 minutes late to class in many schools, he stays after school. But if a person is 15 minutes late to work they don't get to make up that time. They are fired." If students are late, they must return to Aurora with their parents and explain why they were late. "After two weeks of this policy, kids weren't late anymore—and by the end of the year, we had no truancy problem.

High expectations and intensive contact with adults are key to the success of Aurora's program, Peake believes. "We heard for years that if we held high expectations for kids they would move up to the expectations, but I didn't really believe it. It is true, however. Students connect to adults in their learning exhibitions, in their service projects, and in their academic projects. If students can connect to adults, they begin to see that adults are resources, not the enemy. That is one of the key reasons this school is successful. We have taught the kids that there are adults who can take them where they want to go. Not only that, there are adults who are warm and supportive."

"Our old motto was to be their second mothers and fathers and encourage dependency. As a result, they would graduate and fail. The new motto is: We love you, we are going to challenge you, and we are going to require that you go out and find other adults and listen to their feedback so you can develop your own support system in the world instead of only relying on us."

Part of Aurora's new philosophy also relates to the length of time each student spends at the school—which is highly individual. "They don't have to graduate when they are 18," Peake says emphatically. "They have to graduate when they are ready. Under the old philosophy, we got them, we accelerated them, and we graduated them quickly. The new philosophy says that we are in no hurry."

When Aurora's students graduate, they are well-prepared for the future—and must demonstrate their level of preparation with a thorough exit interview. "They come to it with a three-inch binder full of their work," Peake continues, "done on both IBM and Macintosh computers because they have to be proficient with both. They show up dressed in their suits and ties, ready to take interview questions on their individual and service projects, equipped with letters of recommendation, a resume, job applications, and an action plan." These exit interviews, Peake says with obvious feeling, "can be very emotional. They put so much into their school experience. It is very powerful, and it demonstrates what can be done. It is so simple, if you restructure your program to match what you need to create."

Continuing Challenges for Calexico

Despite Calexico's achievements, it cannot remain static, Palicio emphasizes. "We have been fortunate to have tremendous stability in the district in that our superintendent, our director of personnel, and I have been here since 1968. We have been teachers, coordinators, principals, and we are still here. The superintendent is a graduate of Calexico High School. I have worked with him and the personnel director for 25 years. But Calexico's restructuring process demands that we redefine our roles as teachers, administrators, and learners. We truly believe we must continue to change our curriculum and our practices so that students are challenged to be better problem-solvers, take more responsibility for their learning, and be creative and critical thinkers."

Pearson voices his own concerns. "We need time for our staff, time to talk," he says. "I worry about the physical and emotional health of our youngsters, since we are a very poor community."

"We are not perfect," Palicio concludes. "But in another district that is 98% Hispanic, they could have a mentality that says English only, allows putdowns, and asks: What are we going to do with these kids? That is not our message."

Recommendations

- Eliminate castelike tracking and ability grouping that limit students' exposure to, and awareness of, high-quality instruction. Instead, emphasize flexible learning arrangements, such as small groups with shared responsibility for learning and projects that demonstrate the quality and content of the knowledge that has been gained.

- Establish high-quality, additive bilingual programs at all grade levels to ensure that students can learn appropriate content without losing facility in the native language.

- Rather than searching for a culprit (i.e., high school staff blaming elementary teachers and elementary teachers blaming families) establish an ethos where problems are collective, responsibility for solutions is shared, and solutions are communicated to all stakeholders in the educational process.

- Employ structural arrangements such as academies or houses, which group students with interdisciplinary teams of teachers to strengthen the quality of both the material students learn and the way in which it is taught. In this way, the educational experience can be personalized for students through purposeful interaction with adults.

- Encourage a sense of students' futures postgraduation by linking them to institutions of higher education or the workforce. If students require financial aid to attend two- or four-year colleges, such aid needs to be both available and easy to access. Community members who are contacted by schools and social service agencies can offer useful internships to students during their high school experience through which they can test their skills, acquire new capacities, and make contacts for future employment.

- Establish a climate of high expectations for student conduct and performance, but also extend genuine adult nurturing and realistic love to students to ensure that students bond both to school and to adults. This climate of high expectations—combined with coaching and tutoring— demands that adults abandon behaviors that enable poor student performance, and relinquish the belief that students who present risk factors such as lack of proficiency in English or poverty cannot succeed academically.

- Support and develop dedicated staff through substantial investment in high-quality, intensive staff development that expands teachers' knowledge and expertise of key curricular areas identified as clear priorities within the school and district. Through focused, ongoing staff development that is part of a district's instructional goals and strategies, staff can avoid the "one shot," didactic, and fragmented approach to staff development found in many schools and districts.

- Partner with parents in a way that corresponds to their needs and the needs of their children, and communicates clearly the instructional goals of the district. For example, if students present behavioral problems in schools, develop concrete strategies to work with parents in a systems approach, such as parenting classes and support groups. Instructional priorities and goals need to be communicated to parents, and dissent or disagreement must be negotiated so that all educational stakeholders can buy into the educational process for their children.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ensuring Academic Success for Hispanic Students: Three Elementary School Programs

Many of the Hispanic students in our schools are living in poverty. In fact, two in five Hispanic children live in poverty—twice the poverty rate for all children (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1996). Combined with limited English proficiency, this presents among the most significant barrier to academic success for Hispanic students (Fashola, Slavin, Calderón, & Durán, 1996). Moreover, schools may fail to create a lasting bond with their Hispanic students when existing programs are out of touch with the students' educational needs. Students fall further behind, not reading at grade level, not comprehending mathematics, and not forming positive relationships with school staff. Their academic alienation too easily results in students abandoning school entirely for an uncertain future.

But, many would argue, aren't poverty and its effects far beyond the capabilities of school staff? Is it fair to demand that schools respond to such profound social problems with programs that offer students an opportunity to experience academic success and caring relationships with adults? Is it even possible? Or is the task far too massive?

In a paper written for the HDP (1996), CRESPAR researchers Olatokunbo S. Fashola, Robert E. Slavin, Margarita Calderón (all at Johns Hopkins University) and Richard Durán (University of California at Santa Barbara), explored these and related questions. The authors reviewed several programs at the elementary and middle level that have demonstrated academic efficacy, asking: What programs are most effective for Latino students regardless of their language proficiency, and regardless of the availability of native-language instruction? (Fashola et al., 1996, p. 4)

Such research shows that demonstrably effective programs at the elementary or middle level already are flourishing in schools around the country. In this chapter, we focus on three of those programs: *Success for All*, the *HOSTS* Program (Helping One Student to Succeed, a tutoring program pairing adults with youth) and Cognitively Guided Instruction (*CGI*). While only *Success for All* has a form specifically designed for Spanish-dominant students, both the *HOSTS* Program and *CGI* show positive results and have been widely replicated among Hispanic and nonHispanic students.

As Fashola and her colleagues conclude, program effectiveness is not mysterious nor is it particularly elusive. Effective programs share certain attributes, including clear goals, methods and materials linked to those goals, constant assessment of students' progress, and adequate professional development (Fashola, et al., 1996, pp. 63-65).

To bond Hispanic students to schools, and prepare them for productive roles as citizens in a democratic society, school staff need to familiarize themselves with the many outstanding programs available to strengthen their current instructional and social agenda, and to implement programs best suited to the individual needs of their student populations.

Success for All: Lackland City Elementary School

Success for All is a comprehensive schoolwide reform effort designed to transform the entire learning environment to achieve academic success. The program maintains two overarching beliefs: 1.) that children must succeed academically, and 2.) that it is possible to equip school staff with the skills and strategies to ensure academic success.

A key component of the *Success for All* model is early intervention, with plenty of one-on-one tutoring in reading if students show signs of falling behind. Tutors are certified teachers who work with individual students for 20-minute blocks scheduled around their reading or math periods. Since a chief programmatic tenet insists that every child must read at grade level by the end of third grade, *Success for All* builds in appropriate strategies for instruction, assessment, and meeting students' personal needs so this goal can be realized.

A strong emphasis on cooperative learning, regular eight-week assessments of student achievement, and flexible, shifting placements in reading groups also distinguish the reform from other programs. *Success for All* includes a beginning reading curriculum, *Lee Conmigo* (Read with me), for schools with Spanish/English bilingual programs. *Lee Conmigo* uses instructional strategies similar to those in the English program (Reading Roots) but curriculum materials and sequencing appropriate to Latino culture and the Spanish language (Fashola, et al., 1996, p. 11).

Evaluations of *Success for All* show consistent positive results, with effect sizes that average approximately + 0.5 standard deviation at each grade level. Students in the lowest quartile show average effect sizes of +1.0 or above—more than a full standard deviation. Differences between *Success for All* students and control students average three months (grade equivalent) in the first grade, increasing to more than a full grade equivalent by fifth grade (Fashola et al., 1996).

Lackland City Elementary School, located in the Northside Independent School District on the west side of San Antonio, Texas, serves a student population of approximately 600 students whose demographics reveal both poverty and the special needs of a diverse student population. Ninety percent of the student body qualify for free and reduced lunch; 87 percent of the students are Hispanic, seven percent are Caucasian, six percent are African American; approximately 50 percent of their parents are unemployed and receive some sort of assistance; the school has a 35 percent mobility rate.

Lackland City Elementary made the commitment to schoolwide reform in the 1994-95 academic year, spurred by the desire to improve student achievement and by the recognition that staff needed to attend to social and personal problems that influenced students' academic performance. As a result of the staff's research on effective educational strategies and programs—and the belief that both students and teachers could do better—the school chose to implement *Success for All*'s strong reading component and math curriculum. In addition, Lackland City made several structural changes recommended by *Success for All*, invested in staff development and ongoing feedback, and adopted a schoolwide, proactive approach to solving students' academic and personal/social problems.

The results have exceeded staff expectations. In 1994, only 51 percent of fifth- graders at Lackland passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading. That percentage jumped to 63 in 1995, after one year of *Success for All*, and to 84 percent in 1996. Gains in mathematics were similar, with 55 percent of Lackland fifth-graders passing the math TAAS in 1994 and 86 percent achieving a passing score in 1996.

The philosophy that undergirds *Success for All* is relentlessly positive: Every child must succeed in school, every child must read at grade level or better by the end of third grade, and it is imperative for school staff to ensure each child's academic and personal success. Over the next several pages, three of Lackland City's staff discuss key changes in attitudes and achievement that have come about since the *Success for All* program was adopted.

- Jerry D. Allen is principal of Lackland City Elementary School.
- Elma Noyola is the school's *Success for All* coordinator.
- Daryl Michel is a second-grade teacher at Lackland City.

Prior to the implementation of *Success for All* at Lackland City Elementary School, staff were dissatisfied with student achievement—but not unified about a schoolwide strategy to improve outcomes. They had become discouraged by the overwhelming needs of their students—needs that they saw little way to meet. Yet staff were united in the belief that all children should be served by any school improvement effort they might undertake. "The fact that the program included every single child in the school," says Jerry D. Allen, Lackland City's principal, "was one of its biggest advantages—along with its strong research base and specific instructional strategies."

The choice of *Success for All* began democratically, with a teacher-led committee that reviewed research on programs that showed success with economically disadvantaged students. Once this committee recommended *Success for All* to Allen, he reacted promptly. "We visited sites in Houston," he recalls, "and were able to convince our district to free us from our regular program and get involved with *Success for All*."

The major challenges Lackland City faced, Allen believes, were attitudinal and structural. "We needed to believe in the importance of the children's education—all of us, teachers and families. We also needed to learn good techniques for capturing the students' attention and moving them forward academically. Every single one of us needed to be committed to the belief that learning is important and can be achieved by all children."

The *Success for All* philosophy and belief that all children must succeed goes far beyond optimistic or dogmatic rhetoric and slogans, Allen contends. "When we say children cannot fail," he observes, "we have to be prepared to give each teacher tremendous support. Many principals simply say: 'Teachers, this kid can't fail.' That's easy—and it doesn't work. But in this program, when the teacher experiences a problem with a student, it becomes everyone's responsibility. It becomes the Child Advocacy Committee's responsibility or the Family Support Team

Committee's duty to get the child the necessary tutoring, to see if social needs are met, and to relieve worries the child is experiencing. We want to be the best neighbor possible to our families and children."

The Success for All Process

Today, Allen points to a faculty charged with a clear focus and crystalline goals. "We reinvented the way we do things," he states simply. "The first year of *Success for All*, the most experienced teacher was reduced to the same level of expertise as the new teachers because the program was new to all of us. We have seen enormous gains in the level of communication that has occurred among staff because of the program's structure."

One such structure was implemented the year prior to *Success for All*, when Lackland City formed a Child Advocacy Committee to address the massive personal needs of students in a concerted, focused way. This committee—composed of Allen, the school's social worker, educational psychologist, school nurse, the current *Success for All* facilitator, special education facilitator, and mathematics facilitator—continues to meet weekly to deal with any problems referred to it by teachers.

"We know," Allen says, "that if a child is involved with social struggles he or she is not here with a full, clear opportunity to learn. If a child has no eyeglasses, no food, no clothing, or utilities are turned off at home, we consider all of these as factors that determine how well the child will learn."

The advent of *Success for All*, with the attendant schoolwide committee, confirmed that staff had made the right beginning. Allen says, "We have a real community effort now when a child is in trouble. We found that we had been providing services in a somewhat scattered manner from many people, and we hadn't been communicating with each other. The initial purpose of the committee was to improve communication among ourselves about the child and the family. We then began a case approach in which someone takes command of the case. That person follows the family all the way through the process until it is a healthy family again."

Allen points to a previously held schoolwide, pervasive belief that the social and personal issues of students were beyond the capabilities of school staff. "We ignored the social issues. That wasn't our job; that was somebody else's job. We have since had a major philosophical change and have realized amazing results in all areas."

Elma Noyola, Lackland City's *Success for All* facilitator, provides eloquent testimony about how this process works. "We have a Read and Response program in *Success for All*," she begins. "Every child in our school has to read for 20 minutes at home, Monday through Thursday, and have their parents sign a form that says they listened to their children read aloud to them."

If a child comes to school and says he or she couldn't do the reading at home because the parent wasn't available, Noyola and Lackland City's school liaison person, Angie Landeros, go to the home. "We introduce ourselves, tell family members about the program, and tell them how they can help us. Many parents will tell me that they don't read or don't understand English. I tell them: 'Give the child your time. You can help them with reading at home.' We treat parents with respect, and as a result they acknowledge and accept what we want them to do."

Home visits always accentuate the positive, Noyola says, with good news about a child's performance at school first and foremost and with emphasis on building rapport with parents through shared experiences. Noyola explains, "Because Angie Landeros and I are both moms, we can say: We know you are busy, but when you are cutting the carrots or making dinner, have your child read to you. You can listen while you work."

Lackland City also works to support parents with classes that will help build their language and educational skills. The school's English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes for parents are held during the day and the evening to accommodate different schedules. A GED class helps parents obtain a high school credential and improve the likelihood of finding better paying employment.

Even marital and family conflict has become something Lackland City does not ignore. "We had children whose parents were in turmoil," Allen says. "To help them, we work with a United Way mental health community agency. We succeeded in getting a half day of a family-licensed therapist to work at our campus. She works with our families and our children. We have been able to address these needs, not ignore them."

Ensuring that children's health needs were met with appropriate medical attention also became Lackland City's responsibility. "If you truly make the commitment that every child will succeed," Allen reflects, "it is incumbent upon you to find the resources to make those things happen. Our children weren't getting good medical attention. Some had never had a physical or an inoculation. Instead, we spent time removing children from school because their vaccinations were not current—totally contrary to what we should be doing as a school and a staff." To support their student health goals, Lackland City has entered a partnership with Santa Rosa Children's Hospital in San Antonio. "We feel fortunate," Allen reports, "because doctors come to the school to provide early diagnostic and preventive services."

Instruction With Success for All

In addition to the shift to proactive attention to students' personal needs, the face of instruction at Lackland City has changed dramatically. As second-grade teacher Daryl Michel says, "All children used to read the same story at the same time in the regular classroom. Whether you were high or low in reading, you moved at the same rate as everybody else. The only variety was that every week we changed stories."

As part of *Success for All*'s reading component, students are moved into cross-age, cross-grade, achievement-appropriate reading groups. Students are regrouped after regular eight-week assessments, although children are not moved backwards. Michel explains, "Every student in my reading group is at approximately the same level as every other student in the group, which works much better. If somebody is really struggling or really excelling, we can move them to different groups. We don't want students going backwards, however. Instead, our emphasis is on pushing those who are excelling into the next level if we think they will succeed. We keep the lower achieving readers at the same level, without moving them backwards, and gradually build them up until they are at the same level as the other students."

The highly structured reading program appeals to Michel and other teachers. "Students work much of the time with partners, not just by themselves, and there is a lot of group work and cooperative learning. As a result, kids speak out more and do much more with presenting material than they did before. They learn how to speak in front of people."

Lackland City has few monolingual-Spanish-speaking students. Instead, it has a sturdy bilingual program in which it uses the Spanish materials provided by *Lee Conmigo*. "We are all master reading teachers now," Noyola notes. "We no longer can tell the difference between experienced teachers and those who are just starting out. Our attitude used to be: No one is going to teach me how to teach reading because I have been teaching for 20 or 30 years and I know how to do it. The proof for experienced teachers that these strategies work is clear. At the end of a day they can see that 100 percent or even 90 percent of the children understand the concept.

Everyone is focused on one goal and it is the success of our reading. From one classroom to the next, you can see the consistency. Teachers still have their individual personalities, but the strategies we use are consistent throughout the entire school, from kindergarten through fifth grade."

Michel acknowledges that cooperative grouping does not come easily at first for all children due to the tendency of some children to try to dominate the group. However, the program's structure again is the key. "Each student has a role, such as the reader or the recorder, and therefore four students work together to create a product. I respect all the children," Michel explains, "and became very attached to last year's class. Many of them come back to see me, to visit after school, to tell me how they are doing. That in itself represents a lot."

The Importance of Professional Feedback

Allen believes that a major reason staff have adjusted to the educational philosophy and instructional strategies offered by *Success for All* is the presence of intensive staff development prior to the program's implementation—coupled with continued, expert feedback provided by *Success for All* consultants during the school year.

"In the reading program, we begin with three days of training," Allen explains, "which we hold in the summer. In the week of Thanksgiving, which all children have off, teachers have the first two days of that week as in-service. In November, we have our first implementation check from *Success for All* consultants. They visit every classroom and observe each teacher during reading instruction."

Consultants provide individual, one-on-one feedback as well as team feedback, Allen says. "New teachers have the opportunity to ask: 'Is this what you mean? Is this the way I should be doing this?' What they want and need, of course, is validation. Not only do they receive that, but they also discover some things they need to concentrate on. That identifies our weaknesses. We have these implementation checks in the fall and in the spring."

Developing Professional Community

An unanticipated benefit for school staff has been the development of professional community through interactions outside the classroom that focus on improving instruction. The difference, Noyola says, can be seen most visibly in the teachers' lounge—traditionally a room where teachers go to escape the demands of the school day. "When we began *Success for All*, it was all teachers could talk about," she recalls. 'How are you doing this? What is especially successful? Can you help me with this?' We were all so involved; the enthusiasm we had engulfed us."

From a school struggling to meet the needs of its students and their families, Lackiand City is evolving into a completely different environment. "We are a service- oriented school," Noyola emphasizes. " Parents now feel very comfortable coming into the school. They can visit with the staff or with me at any time. They can come to our lending library. They can borrow books. They can watch what goes on in the classroom. There are loads of projects for them. Many Hispanics," she concludes, "had a bad experience in school and are turned off by it. We want everybody to feel welcome, and we have witnessed it with our hearts."

Helping One Student to Succeed (*HOSTS*): Sparks Elementary School and Saucedo Academy

HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) is a highly structured tutoring program that pairs volunteer mentors with targeted students at risk of school failure. Tutoring is provided in 30-minute periods for three to five days per week, depending on the school, and is offered either as a pullout program during the school day or as an afterschool program. Title I funding usually finances all or part of the *HOSTS* program costs, as it does for *Success for All.*

Volunteers work one-on-one with students on lessons prepared by the Title I teacher from materials provided by *HOSTS*. Lesson plans are generated from a comprehensive database that aligns the school's curriculum to local or state standards. Prior to entry into the *HOSTS* program, the school's reading specialist tests each child individually to determine where the student needs remedial reading instruction. Computer software generates a prescription for each child, which dictates the lesson plan followed by volunteers. A brief test taken on the computer, also generated by the software to match the lesson plan, measures the student's comprehension at the conclusion of each lesson.

The *HOSTS* program emphasizes tutoring in language arts, although a math tutoring program is sometimes used in tandem with language arts instruction. A bilingual language arts tutoring program is also available from *HOSTS*.

The U.S. Department of Education has designated the *HOSTS* program as a nationally validated Title I approved system and *HOSTS* has met criteria to become a member of the National Diffusion Network. It has received awards from the National Council of Teachers of English, the

National Center for Dropout Prevention at Clemson University, and recognition from the National School Boards Association. In addition, seven states have received the U.S. Secretary of Education's Excellence in Compensatory Education Award upon the nomination of *HOSTS* as their state's exemplary compensatory program.

To illustrate how the *HOSTS* program works, we feature the stories of two schools currently using the language arts component. The first, Sparks Elementary School in Pasadena, Texas, is classified as a Title I school. It serves a high-poverty population of 705 students, K-5, and has a mobility rate of approximately 25 percent. Pasadena, a formerly prosperous large suburb of Houston, is dealing with rapidly changing demographics. Its student population is 72 percent Hispanic and 24 percent white. Sparks Elementary School, as well as 17 other elementary schools in the Pasadena Independent School District, began to use the *HOSTS* program in the 1994-95 academic year. Two years later, in the 1996-97 academic year, Sparks Elementary was incorporating *Success for All* as a major change initiative and planning to use it in tandem with the *HOSTS* program.

The second school, Saucedo Academy in Chicago, Illinois, also began working with the *HOSTS* program during the 1994-95 academic year. Saucedo Academy is an inner-city school in a predominately Mexican American neighborhood. It serves approximately 1,300 students prekindergarten through eighth grade, and a student population that is 90 percent Hispanic with the remainder divided between African American and white. Saucedo's "options" status within the Chicago Public Schools means that students must apply to be admitted and are accepted by lottery, not by academic achievement.

For the 1995-96 academic year, Saucedo Academy reported mean grade- equivalent gains for the students enrolled in its *HOSTS* program of 1.22 at fifth grade, 1.12 at sixth grade, and .9 at seventh grade. For the same academic year, Sparks Elementary reported reading gains of 1.0 grade levels, while the Pasadena District's overall reading gains varied from 1.0 to 2.6 grade levels. The Pasadena district also attributes improved promotion, report card grades, attendance, and scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to students' participation in the *HOSTS* program.

At both schools, volunteer mentors represent the private sector, the community (including retirees), and school staff committed to the program's goals:

- Tanya Klasser is the *HOSTS* coordinator and curriculum coordinator at Saucedo Academy in Chicago, Illinois.
- Nancy Morris is Principal of Saucedo Academy and a mentor in the *HOSTS* program.
- Debbie Ridgway is the *HOSTS* coordinator and Title I teacher at Sparks Elementary School in Pasadena, Texas.
- Diana De Los Santos is Assistant Superintendent for Campus Development in the Pasadena, Texas school district and a mentor in the *HOSTS* program.

Diana De Los Santos believes her work as a *HOSTS* mentor can best be explained by relating the story of Maria, one of her students in the program. "Maria," De Los Santos recollects, "did not like to read. When she started with the *HOSTS* program, she tried to make conversation to divert us from our reading assignment in an attempt not to read. She read in a very unmotivated way, she read because she had to, and she was clearly not enthusiastic about what she was reading."

Questions De Los Santos posed to Maria about content were met with vague responses such as "I don't know" or furtive, hurried attempts to reread the few pages already read and discussed. That she was falling behind did not alarm Maria. Instead, she resisted higher level, demanding content—almost hoping to remain at a level that did not challenge her.

De Los Santos nudged and encouraged Maria through their regular, focused interactions. Since the *HOSTS* language arts program typically is structured so that students read aloud to their mentor for fifteen minutes of the 30-minute tutoring period—a long stretch of time for a timid or reluctant reader—De Los Santos built up to the 15-minute period by fostering a relationship with Maria that focused on a sense of camaraderie in the task of reading.

"Most kids in the *HOSTS* program don't have anyone at home, who has time to listen to them read," she states. "Instead, they read silently—if at all—and don't know if they are pronouncing words correctly. When someone is dedicated to them for thirty minutes, and fifteen of those minutes are spent reading aloud to a mentor, they can see that someone is listening to them—and that someone cares about them."

Part of the 30-minute tutoring period is spent taking a computer-generated test based on the day's assignment. Upon completion of the test, the computer generates a report card for the child that tells how well the child performed.

Taking a test was not Maria's favorite part of the mentoring experience—at least, not initially—but De Los Santos structured it so that it became not only enjoyable, but also eagerly anticipated. "I would take the test on a note pad while she took it on the computer," she explains, "and we would compare our scores. This meant that it was her responsibility to make sure that I understood the lesson. It was a nice, healthy interaction which emphasized that she learned the material but she also worked to explain it to me—the adult who worked with her."

From being an indifferent reader, Maria graduated to reading one book a day. "Maria was always striving for a perfect score on the test," De Los Santos reports with quiet satisfaction. "Of course, after she became so excited about reading, she kept progressing to a harder level. It began to take almost two weeks to finish a book, because the difficulty of the content continued to increase."

Debbie Ridgway, Sparks Elementary's *HOSTS* coordinator and Title I teacher, also remembers Maria. "She is a very likable child," she says, "but she has a difficult home life. She has an older sister involved with gangs. I knew where Maria was headed—and I knew that once she left after fifth grade, she wouldn't do more with her life if we didn't make a real effort to show her what she could do."

Building low-achieving students' confidence is key to the program, Ridgway and De Los Santos believe—and a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult provides the necessary boost.

Benefits for Mentors

Karen Morris, principal of Chicago's Saucedo Magnet School, sees an additional benefit that accrues to school administrators who volunteer as *HOSTS* mentors. "As principals, sometimes we lose personal touch with students," she observes. "We tend to see the big picture rather than needs of individual students. We forget how difficult it is to work with students who have extraordinary needs." Working as a *HOSTS* mentor renews an understanding of children's needs, particularly the need to personalize instruction. The one-on-one relationship between mentors and students allows children to experience something powerful: the undivided, positive attention of an adult attuned to their learning.

"Many of our parents work in factories," Morris says with clear empathy, "leaving early in the morning for work and returning home late at night. Their children don't have much contact with adults, one-on-one. They need that relationship, they need that encouragement, and they need to know that one person in the building is following their academic progress, helping them along."

The HOSTS Process

School staff in the Pasadena Independent School District as well as at Saucedo Academy like the fact that the tight structure of the *HOSTS* program makes it possible to utilize volunteers in a genuine, nonpatronizing way that results in direct educational and social benefits for children. "This is a very structured, efficient way to involve volunteers," Ridgway says, "and they are working with children in a very constructive way. The *HOSTS* program enabled me, as the reading specialist, to oversee a group of very dedicated people who come in here and work one-on-one with children."

Although highly structured, the program allows for on-site flexibility. At Sparks Elementary, tutoring occurs during the school day; at Saucedo Academy, tutoring is a special afterschool program where students are solicited for the program, and parents sign a contract summarizing their commitment to ensuring that their children attend the program.

Goals for the program can also be tailored to the school's individual needs, as long as raising achievement and diminishing racial, ethnic, and gender-related achievement gaps are paramount. "We want," Ridgway emphasizes, "to make sure that everyone has a fair and equitable education."

The Recruitment and Training of Mentors

Mentors are recruited community wide from corporations, civic organizations, and retirees' groups. Since most mentors cannot give more than one hour per week, the need for a large number of mentors to fill the week's 30-minute slots has to be met with both energy and entrepreneurial skills from the schools' *HOSTS* coordinators.

"We have many teachers, teacher aides, and some parents working as mentors," notes Tanya Klasser, Saucedo's *HOSTS* coordinator. "We also have students from a local high school who mentor as part of a federally funded community-service program."

When mentors are recruited, typical orientations include "get-acquainted" coffees coupled with brief training periods. Organizational work is done by the school's *HOSTS* coordinator, so that mentors pick up their student's folder and assignments at the beginning of the tutoring period.

"Each day, mentors are met with a folder of materials tailored for each child, Ridgway explains. "I train volunteers so they know how to go through the same routine every time they come in. There is a certain place they sit, the child's folder is there, they open the folder, the materials are all prepared for them, they know exactly what the lesson is and how long to work on each part of the lesson. Each tutoring station in the room is equipped with whatever the pair might need. I walk around answering questions, making sure people are staying on task, making sure there are no problems." She adds firmly, "There is no chaos."

The lack of chaos is especially important to school staff, who frequently find volunteers a great deal of additional work without clear academic benefits, Ridgway says frankly. "Teachers have to develop something for that person to do. In addition to showing the volunteer what to do and how to do it, they also have the rest of the children to oversee."

Mentors and Students: Relationships that Foster Achievement

The prescriptive structure of the *HOSTS* program is one reason school staff find it easy to implement. Although staff need to familiarize themselves with the program's software and database of available materials, they rely heavily on the program's software to do much of the rest.

Klasser explains, "You know your student population's grade level and achievement level, and you order and select materials based on that. Everything is on software, very prescriptive, telling not only what material to use for each child but which pages of each piece of material they need to work on. The prescriptions are based on pretest data on each child that I enter into the computer."

Prescriptions emphasize remediation and mastery of concepts that have not been conquered in the regular classroom. Mentors also are urged to avoid unnecessary repetition once a student has learned the concept. "We emphasize that mentors should never spend more time than is needed on any particular area," Klasser says. "If a child is working on prefixes and after four or five exercises has mastered the concept, mentors are trained to move on even though the prescription might have twenty activities to complete."

With the emphasis the *HOSTS* program places on remediation of basic skills, do children become discouraged or find the drill boring? Klasser believes that a large library of additional materials—highly recommended by the program—helps ward off monotony. "The kids get to choose their books with a range of available materials," she explains, "and they write a response to what they have read. Sometimes they write a response to something else that is going on in their lives, such as a new baby in the family of something sad, such as a death."

Mentors are warned not to stray from the academic focus into the realm of personal counseling. "If a child wants to talk about something and is distressed, it is fine if it happens once or twice, because that creates a bond between the child and mentor," Klasser states. "But if it happens more frequently, there is a need that we want to address with a professional counselor."

De Los Santos agrees. "Some children are so eager for attention," she notes with some poignancy, "that they bond at almost a moment's notice. With others, it takes about six to nine weeks and occurs after the steady attention of the same adults, week after week. They realize that these people keep coming back and are genuinely interested in what they are doing and how they are learning."

Programmatic Goals and Gains

"At our school," Ridgway observes, "reading is key. We believe that as a faculty. If the child can't read, he simply won't perform as well as the child who reads at grade level. This is why we have chosen the programs we use: to meet our primary goal to get children to read at grade level."

De Los Santos agrees, "My own goal as a mentor is to see the child progress from being a reader without confidence to a fluent reader who reads for fun and pleasure. If you read, you can tour the world. If you read, you can do anything."

Ridgway illustrates the gains *HOSTS* students have made at Sparks Elementary—an average of 1.0 grade level gains. "I had thirty students who took the state achievement test. Six students left at different times of the year and were replaced by other students. Out of the twenty-four who were in the program for the full academic year, twenty-two passed." She adds, "It depends on how remedial they are at the start. Two years ago, I worked with children whose reading achievement was very low. Those children's reading comprehension improved on an average of two years or two grade levels."

To ensure that students receive their initial instruction in their primary language—thus facilitating a smooth transition from one language to the other —Sparks Elementary students who are monolingual in Spanish are usually matched with bilingual mentors. At Saucedo Academy, in contrast, staff emphasize English for classroom interactions outside the bilingual program. "We want English spoken during an instructional program in English or in the mentoring program," Klasser reports. "We think this is important because many students hear English only at school. Since vocabulary is a big part of the program, this is a natural area of emphasis."

At both schools, it is the power of the dyadic relationship between students and adults or students and older students that makes the difference, these educators insist. As Ridgway concludes, "We always are told that it takes a whole village to raise a child. If anything depicts that, it is the *HOSTS* program. We are trying to get our entire community to work with children in a way that will improve their achievement—and this program provides a structured way for schools to do that."

Cognitively Guided Instruction (*CGI*): Broad Acres Elementary School and Jefferson Elementary School

Cognitively Guided Instruction (*CGI*), a mathematics program designed to develop student problem-solving in the early elementary grades, was developed by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using a framework that requires teachers to use students' prior knowledge and understanding of mathematics—even at ages when educators might assume children have little problem-solving ability—this program seeks to develop mathematics with understanding. A key component of *CGI* is the fact that there are multiple correct ways to solve a given problem.

As part of *CGI*'s recommended training prior to implementation, teachers are taught to create curricula using new understandings of how children learn. In most cases, approximately three full weeks are allotted to familiarize teachers with the *CGI* approach to mathematics—an approach far different from customary mathematics instruction at the elementary level.

Studies of *CGI* have demonstrated its effectiveness. Chapter 1 elementary students in Milwaukee, for example, outscored their control-group counterparts on standardized tests of mathematics achievement. The group included many bilingual and limited English proficient Hispanics. A second study had similar results; the study also found that *CGI* students had better attitudes toward math (Fashola et al., 1996).

To illustrate how *CGI* works, how teachers use their students' understanding of mathematics to build upon and expand their knowledge of mathematics problem-solving, and how they develop curricula to accommodate *CGI*'s approach, we feature two schools in which *CGI* has influenced mathematics instruction.

The first, Broad Acres Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, participated in Project *IMPACT*, a NSF-funded project based at the University of Maryland. Project *IMPACT* (Increasing the Mathematical Power of All Children and Teachers) used the key tenets of *CGI* in a five-year effort to improve the mathematics achievement of low-achieving children in six high-poverty schools in Montgomery County, Maryland. Currently, Broad Acres is in its fourth year of mathematics instruction based on *CGI*—due to its principal's belief that *CGI* has had such a positive effect on students' achievement that it should continue.

Broad Acres Elementary School has been identified as the most economically needy school in Montgomery County, Maryland; 95 percent of the 600 students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The student population is 50 percent African American, 38 percent Hispanic, and 12 percent Asian. A strong multicultural atmosphere is tangible schoolwide, Spanish and several Asian languages are spoken in the school, and students are at varying levels of English language proficiency.

Mathematics achievement at Broad Acres rose significantly after implementation of *CGI*-based mathematics instruction. While the year prior to *CGI*-based instruction, only 13 percent of students met the standard on Maryland's criterion-referenced achievement test, the first year of *CGI* that figure rose to 40 percent at each grade level (grades 3, 4, and 5). During its second year of implementation, 83 percent of third-graders, 72 percent of fourth-graders, and 76 percent of fifth-graders met the standard; the third year, the percentages remained approximately the same.

The second school featured in this chapter is Jefferson Elementary School in Lennox, California. Jefferson Elementary embarked upon *CGI* through a collaboration with Megan Loef Franke, a mathematics educator at the University of California-Los Angeles, who was interested in exploring and implementing the beliefs and philosophy of *CGI* with school staff. Teachers at Jefferson Elementary absorbed the ideas central to *CGI* in an ongoing manner, rather than through a formal training period prior to the school year.

Jefferson Elementary serves approximately 1,100 students; 90 percent of the student body is Hispanic and 87 percent is LEP; 92 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. Lennox, a high-poverty community located near the Los Angeles International Airport, is a major port of entry for immigrants into the United States.

Although data from Jefferson Elementary School on the effects of CGI were not available for this report, interviews with school staff suggest that it is having a positive effect. The next few pages focus on the comments and conclusions of staff from both Jefferson Elementary and Broad Acres Elementary schools regarding the CGI program.

- JoAnn Isken was Principal of Jefferson Elementary School until the 1996-97 academic year.
- Jennifer Schexnayder was a teacher of grades 4/5 at Jefferson Elementary School.
- Dionna Ricks is a fourth-grade teacher at Broad Acres Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland.
- Anna Suarez is the mathematics specialist at Broad Acres Elementary School and has been involved with *CGI* since graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Prior to working with *CGI*, seeing her students achieve true understanding of mathematical problems and solutions was a source of real frustration to Jennifer Schexnayder, who became involved with *CGI* as a fourth/fifth-grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary School in Lennox, California. "My students clearly didn't understand certain concepts," she explains, "but they could arrive at the correct answer."

While many teachers would have accepted the correct answer with pleasure and moved on, Schexnayder was troubled—believing that genuine understanding of mathematical concepts needed to be achieved. "This really frustrated me," she says with candor. "For example, we might have a problem where four students sat at a table and 50 percent of them wore the color red. At another table we would have eight students and 50 percent of them wore the color red. My students would think that a higher percentage of students at the table of eight wore the color red because there were more of them at the table." But because they knew the procedure to find percentages, if Schexnayder gave them numbers, "they could crank out percentages," she says with still visible frustration. "I knew they did not have full understanding."

Anna Suarez, a mathematics specialist at Broad Acres Elementary School, was just as frustrated—and especially thwarted by the pernicious effects of poverty on the school's student population. "We have kids," she begins with obvious compassion, "who are bright and beautiful. They have all the aspirations that all children do—including the most privileged—and they have so many strikes against them. The biggest strike against them is poverty," she emphasizes with some vehemence. "Poverty eats away at the dreams they have for themselves and their families. And it isn't fair."

Ensuring that impoverished children understand mathematics is key to Suarez's own mission as an educator—a mission she believes is furthered by the *CGI* philosophy. Its benefits, she maintains, are substantial for both students and staff. She notes that many people, regardless of their socioeconomic status, suffer from a hatred and fear of mathematics, and this provides an additional rationale to change mathematics instruction so that all children can learn in a way that builds upon their knowledge, and encourages multiple solutions to problems.

"Parents frequently tell me that their child is struggling in math," Suarez comments, "and then they add, 'But, I was never good at it.'" Suarez argues that although heredity and genetics have little to do with success in mathematics, anxiety can have profound, scarring effects upon achievement. "I say to parents: Think about your own experiences with math in the past. How do you feel when someone says the word 'math' to you? What kinds of feelings are conjured up in you when you know I want to talk to you—and you know that I teach math?" Often, she maintains, the answer is stark: Parents admit they experience very real anxiety that they communicate inadvertently to their children, along with low expectations for their achievement in math since they themselves struggled with it. "With the *CGI* approach," Suarez continues, "it is possible to see children love math, to really understand it, and not to be afraid if somebody asks them to solve a problem," Suarez points out. "Instead, they are excited and challenged. It is something they want to do rather than something that they dread."

Ricks agrees, noting that at first children accustomed to one-answer-only approaches to mathematics are curious about the change, and surprised that multiple ways of solving a problem are welcomed. The ability to come up with multiple solutions spills over to other situations, providing tangible social benefits. "They see that it is all right to disagree," Ricks says. "It is all right to have differences. It is all right to find solutions in different ways. The social aspects of learning in this way become very important with this approach."

Another benefit can be seen in the use of language to explain and communicate mathematical concepts. Rather than parroting back an answer they might not understand, children are compelled to read and understand problems, and to articulate their reasoning to others. "They have to explain their thinking," Ricks says, "and when they do, they use better oral skills and that carries over to language. They begin to write better sentences and paragraphs."

CGI In Action

A *CGI* classroom is an environment in which children usually interact informally with the teacher, who poses problems and then probes student answers to unravel the reasoning that led to their conclusions. Problems, which are tailored to real-life situations children can understand, are limited only by a teacher's imagination. For example, a teacher might ask: Sarah has seven trolls in her troll collection. How many more trolls would Sarah need to have in order to have eleven trolls in her collection?

Students work individually to arrive at their answers. Depending on the level of their mathematics understanding, some use counters or other manipulatives to solve a problem. Others prefer to sketch their thinking on paper, drawing diagrams or pictures. When the teacher asks individuals for their answers, the group listens to the responses. A nonjudgmental atmosphere prevails; children are not ridiculed by other children if their answers are incorrect. Instead, the teacher uses the range of answers and problem-solving strategies to illustrate that there are many ways to solve mathematical problems—thus building student confidence.

With the *CGI* approach, the teacher probes to understand students' reasoning. "How did you reach that answer?" is a typical question asked in a *CGI* classroom. As the student explains the thought process that led to a solution, she may illustrate by counting on her fingers, showing the counting process by moving counters, or explaining a sketch. Students also learn to write responses and to articulate their mathematical reasoning both orally and in writing.

Beginning the Shift in Instruction

Staff concur that the *CGI* approach to learning mathematics demands much more from teachers. At Broad Acres, participation in Project *IMPACT* provided a major impetus. Teachers received three full weeks of training in the summer prior to implementing the *CGI*-based approach—a time commitment sweetened by a stipend, course credits, the provision of a math specialist during the academic year to assist them, and supplementary materials. "The atmosphere was positive," Suarez remembers. "At my school, even the primary teachers received training, although we focused on the intermediate grades at the beginning."

At Jefferson Elementary, an atmosphere of positive schoolwide reform led to the implementation of *CGI* reports principal JoAnn Isken. "We were involved in a huge partnership project called 'Dialogue With Scientists,' in which some of our teachers, fifth-grade students, and scientists from UCLA would discuss science and science education."

Megan Loef Franke, a UCLA professor and mathematics education researcher, attended one of the dialogues and connected with some Jefferson teachers—beginning what has become an ongoing, focused relationship with the school. "Teachers would gather in the morning, work with Megan, and then go back to their classrooms to try some things that were based on *CGI*," Isken explains. "The next year, Megan taught her university Math Methods class at our school. We opened the class to all staff and we also placed student teachers from UCLA at Jefferson. We regarded these student teachers as the master teachers who would teach our teachers a considerable amount about *CGI*."

Achieving The Shift

Even with substantial support, changing from traditional, didactic mathematics instruction was not easy, yet the process was stimulating for teachers. "I had to think hard about what I know, figure out where that would fit in, and calculate what the next step would be," Schexnayder remembers. "I constantly had to ask myself: What would be the next good question to ask them to take them to a higher level of understanding?"

She adds, "While I may understand mathematics in my own way, now I have to understand it in their way. If I see how they understand it, then I can figure out the next piece to add to their understanding to take them to the bigger picture and really solidify their understanding. Another difficulty is getting the kids to really think about a problem, because in many cases they have been taught to work with numbers in a way that does not demand total understanding. The *CGI* approach means that I have to be able to ask the right question to provoke their thinking—and that is very difficult."

"Teaching in the *CGI* way was very demanding," Schexnayder says candidly, "and very exhilarating at the same time. I was constantly growing when I worked with *CGI*. I learned to let students think."

Ricks says softly, "I had an open mind, but it still takes time to apply this to the classroom. You really have to tune in and listen to what children are saying and not impose your own thinking over their solutions. For instance, if I ask a student: John had two apples. He got three more apples. How many apples did he have altogether? The child replies: Five apples. I ask: How do you know he had five apples? The child says: I know two plus two is four and one more is five. I could say: You mean that two times two is four and one more makes five—but that is not what the child is saying. That is my interpretation of what the child is saying—and my interpretation tells the child that his own solution was incorrect."

Teaching Mathematics to LEP Students

How do teachers accommodate different languages in the mathematics classroom? Suarez points to the use of cooperative groups, saying, "Students explain what they are doing to each other, sometimes switching back and forth from Spanish to English so that everybody is involved. The teacher uses a lot of visuals to communicate to kids who don't understand what she is saying. We also prepare students before a concept is introduced to the class by working with them in small groups in their language." Journal writing, an element not traditionally used in mathematics instruction at the elementary level, is useful as well, she reports. "We give students a problem and they solve it in their journals. Often the kids will write in Spanish in their journals. We accept that, but we push them to write in English."

Isken says, "When students get up to share their problem-solving strategies at our school, the first child might do so in English and the second one in Spanish. Even if students only spoke English or Spanish, they would write their strategy on the easel and work the class through the strategy. The kids became very skilled at communicating what they didn't understand. The kids were open to input in any language, which is an attitudinal standard at Jefferson."

Benefits for Teachers and Students

"Teachers truly become professionals through the use of *CGI*," Suarez states. One key benefit, she believes, is the development of teacher professionalism—the ability to question and analyze one's own practice. "To work with *CGI* successfully," she enlarges, "one has to develop, read, and have a framework on which to base every instructional decision—and then constantly question what one is doing. That is what it means to be a good teacher. Not only did *CGI* affect my math instruction, but its effects carried over into all areas of instruction. I began to question all sorts of common practices—and I constantly examined what I was doing in the classroom and what I was trying to accomplish. I was always searching for what knowledge students were bringing to me that I should build on in my instruction."

Dionna Ricks, a fourth-grade teacher at Broad Acres, has a similar view. "Before, I had a lot of rigorous structure in my mathematics instruction," she notes, "that allowed only one acceptable response or answer to a question. It was a very concrete way to teach mathematics. There was only one way to add, one way to subtract, and one way to teach math skills."

At the start of the intensive training demanded by Project *IMPACT*, teachers were challenged to shift their personal mathematics paradigms dramatically to use the knowledge and problem-solving skills that very young children bring with them into the classroom. "We were taught to look at what children have to offer, what different experiences they bring into the classroom to help their learning," Ricks asserts. "We learned very concrete things, such as increasing the wait time after a question. If we give students more time to respond, they think more about the problem or situation in a more in-depth manner."

Students learn to believe in their own problem-solving abilities through the *CGI* approach to mathematics, Suarez says. "By the time we had worked with students in this way for a year, they persisted with problems rather than giving up. They struggled and they thought through them. This is something we see again and again—a student will try a strategy, think about the problem, and know it doesn't work, think some more, and then try something else. The operative word is 'think.' They are thinking as opposed to mimicking something they have heard. They are constructing their understanding. We often say that we want children to develop a love for reading, but we don't think the same about math. *CGI* shows kids how this can develop."

Schexnayder concurs. "I taught math thematically. In a unit on pioneers, for example, I would take a true contextual problem of pioneers that involved numbers. One problem was: How much could you, as a pioneer, fit into a covered wagon? It was difficult. But the kids weren't discouraged. They knew they could draw the wagons, they knew they could calculate it, they knew they could figure it out. That does much more for them," Schexnayder says, "than just spouting answers. They are willing to take on almost anything. At the end of that year, my fifth-graders took the standardized test to get into the honors club and a lot of them didn't pass. Their solution was to put together a portfolio. They had the mentality that said: I can do anything. I am going to prove to you that I know this."

CGI and Standardized Tests

When taught via *CGI*, are students prepared to score well on standardized tests? Are there obvious incompatibilities? Schexnayder addresses this on a variety of levels, saying, "The standard algorithm is a very efficient way to solve the problem—whether you understand it or not. Students can use their own algorithms and it is clear that they understand what they are doing, but they may not be able to get through the same number of problems as someone who uses the standard algorithm. On the other hand, the standard algorithm is not efficient for many students because they don't understand what they are doing. When they come up with outrageous answers, they don't understand why their answers are incorrect."

However, she believes this can be overcome. "Students need to be exposed to the standardized test format. They need to learn that their strategies are valid and they can use them. I am an African American woman, and I did have concerns about standardized tests. It is important for students to perform well, especially in urban environments. If they do perform well, many times that determines where they go. I did have concerns about abandoning traditional approaches regardless of the understanding factor, because I was concerned that if kids did not do well on standardized tests it could curtail some of their opportunities." After working with *CGI*, she reports a vestige of concern lingers, but she believes that students can learn mathematics with understanding and learn to score well on standardized tests.

Suarez isn't as concerned. "The hardest part of *CGI*-based mathematics instruction," she says, "is for teachers to believe that kids can do this, that they don't have to tell them how to do something, that kids can, in fact, solve mathematical problems. Teachers come into this at different points just as children do. It requires a great deal from teachers. It requires that they think through a framework, make decisions within that, analyze what the kids are doing, and think about how that will affect the next thing they do."

But she believes it is worth it. "Would you want a neurosurgeon to be updated professionally?" she asks. "Would you want a physician who tested you, got an idea of your problem, analyzed the problem, and then made suggestions—or would you prefer a physician who gave you medicine and waited to see how you reacted to it?"

Recommendations

- Establish faculty program committees to review and recommend specific programs for the school to adopt. The program(s) selected should address the needs of Hispanic students most at risk of dropping out of school and emphasize positive relationships with adults along with increased academic achievement.

- Select those programs that a majority of faculty endorse, that are sympathetic to the school's mission—but that prod school staff into new lines of inquiry and fresh instructional strategies.

- Rather than waiting for new funding to finance a program, proactively seek funding through juggling or shifting district priorities. This requires a strong program rationale and both district and community support. Title I funds, for example, can be used by schools to implement two of the three programs described in this chapter. Title VII monies, as well as special education monies for those students who qualify, also can be used to support programs and schoolwide efforts for LEP students.

- Set deadlines for action on new programs, timelines for their ongoing assessment, and frequent opportunities for faculty discussion and problem-solving. Allow a reasonable period of time (3-5 years) for the program to develop before deciding to discontinue.

- Incorporate any new program as part of a coherent strategy, rather than as an "add on," fragmented effort to reach a segment of the school's population. Realistic implementation timelines, along with expert assistance if needed, are necessary to insure that new programmatic efforts move along and succeed.

- Use new programs as an opportunity to establish a norm of continuous improvement, with improved student achievement and student/family social connections to school as priorities.

- Focus the school on student learning with understanding. Everything else should be made consistent with that goal.

CHAPTER FIVE

Preparing Hispanic Students for Solid Futures: Two Secondary-Level Programs

Frequently, programs with a special purpose such as reducing the dropout rate among youth or building warm, nurturing relationships with peers and adults appear to enjoy success at the elementary school, but fail to take root and flourish in secondary schools. The structure of typical secondary schools, with pressures that include limited time, large student populations, and an emphasis on content coverage, militates against attention to the special needs of those students at particular risk of dropping out of school.

As a result, these students—particularly Hispanic students with their enduring, severe, and shocking dropout rate—suffer. At the secondary level, they frequently drop out entirely or fail to achieve even a modicum of academic success—regardless of their abilities.

What options are available to secondary schools? The most common approaches to dropout prevention at the secondary level include identifying obstacles to academic success and helping students overcome them, or giving students a sense of personal future and reason to complete school.

In this chapter, we focus on two secondary-level programs that have demonstrated success with two different approaches. The first, the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program, targets middle school youth at risk of dropping out and pairs them with elementary or middle school students in a tutoring experience designed to increase their feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, responsibility, bonding to peers and younger children, and feelings of belonging in the school environment. In addition to training as tutors, the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program features a nurturing environment with a teacher assigned to build students' literacy skills and provide special out-of-school experiences, such as field trips.

The other approach, *AVID*, targets secondary students who show academic promise but have not demonstrated their potential in school. Their grades typically are average but their chances of attending college are minimal. The *AVID* program targets these students on the basis of test scores, teacher recommendations, and personal interviews. The *AVID* program builds a future for these students by placing them in college preparatory courses and supporting their success. *AVID* coordinators and teachers ensure that students are scheduled with every class necessary to meet college entrance standards. Special help is provided through in school tutoring that frequently uses local college or university students in a ratio of seven students to one tutor. *AVID* employs instructional strategies that include sophisticated note taking, collaborative learning groups, and an inquiry or Socratic instructional approach.

Both programs provide technical assistance, evaluation, and materials to sites, making it relatively easy and cost effective for schools and districts to work them into their existing services and curriculum. These programs, and others documented in a paper by Fashola and Slavin (1996), illustrate that the Hispanic dropout problem is not insoluble even as late as middle and secondary school. With a relatively modest allocation of resources—and the commitment to diminishing the Hispanic dropout rate through the use of available, replicable programs—solutions are clear, tangible, and attainable.

The *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program: LaJoya Middle School

The *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program is an in school mentoring program targeted to youth at the middle and high school level who are in danger of dropping out of school or having an unsuccessful and unhappy school experience—due to the usual characteristics that place children at risk. It was developed in 1984 by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), a nonprofit organization in San Antonio, Texas, with funding from Coca-Cola USA.

The *Valued Youth* Program model has been selected by the Coca-Cola Foundation as its flagship strategy for addressing the excessive dropout rate among minority youth (Intercultural Development Research Association, 1995); it has received special recognition from the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management in the foundation's first annual award competition for nonprofit programs of excellence and innovation; it also has been recognized by the National Diffusion Network, and by the Secretary of Education as a model dropout prevention program (Intercultural Development Research Association, 1995).

Youth who are selected to participate in the program become tutors of elementary school youth who are at least four grades their junior. As tutors, they work four days a week at the elementary school site, under the supervision of the elementary host teacher and the Valued Youth Program teacher/coordinator. The fifth day, they receive special support in a class that focuses on developing their expertise as tutors, addressing their questions, and boosting their literacy skills. Students who participate in the program receive a modest stipend for their work. A central tenet of the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program is that if youth are valued, they will respond with increased ties to school and to adults.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program's Philosophy

- All students can learn.
- The school values all students.
- All students can actively contribute to their own education and to the education of others.
- All students, parents, and teachers have the right to participate fully in creating and maintaining excellent schools.
- Excellence in schools contributes to individual and collective economic growth, stability, and advancement.
- Commitment to educational excellence is created by students, parents, and teachers working together to set goals, make decisions, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes.

- Students, parents, and teachers must be provided extensive, consistent support in ways that allow students to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to be involved.

To illustrate how the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program works, and the results it achieves, we tell the story of La Joya Middle School, located in La Joya, Texas, a rural district spread over 29 square miles. Agriculture provides the main source of steady employment to families in the La Joya district, although migrant labor—much more transitory and less secure—is also a common source of employment. Eight hundred migrant families send their children to school in the district. Approximately 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Begun in 1991, the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program is one key lever that has tilted the school's dropout rate in a much more positive direction. By the 1995-96 academic year, the La Joya district's dropout rate at twelfth grade had decreased to approximately 2.5 percent.

The Intercultural Development Research Association provides intensive training for program participants, monitors their progress, and evaluates their success. In results reported by La Joya Middle School, parents of program participants highlighted some impressive gains. Approximately 87 percent (88.6%) noted a positive change in their children's behavior as a result of the tutoring program, including increased responsibility and maturity, a more positive attitude, and better behavior. One hundred percent of the parents reported that the program helped their children in school. In addition, students who participated indicated that the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program had changed their lives and their attitudes toward school (La Joya Independent School District, 1994-95). Scores on the Quality of School Life Scale (QSL), administered to all tutors on a pretest/posttest basis, reflected their newly positive feelings.

In this chapter, we hear from staff who work closely with the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program and in the La Joya district:

- Rosario Alaniz is the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Coordinator at Cesar E. Chávez Middle School, formerly La Joya Middle School, La Joya, Texas

- Filamena Leo is the Administrative Assistant for Student Services for the La Joya School District, La Joya, Texas. She was the principal of La Joya Middle School when the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program was implemented.

When Rosario Alaniz volunteered to be the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Coordinator at La Joya Middle School in La Joya, Texas, her attitude toward the program, its goals, and the students she would work with, was positive. Coming from a background similar to those of the La Joya School District's students—impoverished and difficult—Alaniz felt considerable empathy toward the students selected for the special experience offered by the Valued Youth Program.

But she was taken aback at the outset. Instead of instant results and plenty of student appreciation for the program, Alaniz ran up against the twin barriers of chaos and resentment. "The kids had lots of energy," she says with clear understatement. "As I described the program to them, I could see that half were listening and half were not paying attention. We began going to the campus where they would be tutoring younger children—and just walking over there was an experience. They would hit cars to make the alarms go off—and they would hide from me."

But as the program progressed, she began to see small signs of improvement. "The students started to change as they worked in the program. They would talk about the students they were tutoring and ask me for little tokens of appreciation for their students."

How did their attitudes first begin to shift? What were the earliest signs that they were beginning to engage with the program? Alaniz says, "They started to communicate with me. Before, they would not talk to me. They began to ask me how to solve problems with their students, saying: 'Ms. Alaniz, my student doesn't listen to me. What do I do?' Or they would say: 'Sometimes I go there and my student isn't there. What should I do?'"

Alaniz smiles at the obvious irony—and remembers it as the first, tiny sign of positive change. The program served as a mirror held up to students that enabled them to observe themselves through the behaviors and attitudes of their tutees.

Another sign of improvement came when other teachers complained less frequently about students enrolled in the program. "Attendance was improving. I heard fewer complaints from other teachers. Students weren't sent to in-school suspension nearly as frequently—and they were not skipping my class." As an added bonus, grades began to inch upward. "Not dramatically," Alaniz clarifies, "but they were improving. I would tell teachers who came to complain to me that they needed to look at small things to see improvement. Maybe a student brought a pencil and paper to class today—and maybe that is a huge improvement for that student. Once we started to notice those small things, we knew we needed to focus on whatever the student was doing that was positive. "If we only deal in the negative, we become enmeshed in a power struggle that kids at that age enjoy. I began offering lots of reinforcement such as certificates, photographs, and displays that featured the students—and they were shocked. Suddenly they were becoming 'Student of the Month' or 'Most Improved Student'. That had never, ever happened to them before."

Despite such visible improvements, Alaniz emphasizes that no program can offer an instant miracle— asserting that plenty of time, patience, and creativity must be invested in any fledgling effort. "We started the program in February—and I insisted that I keep them the following year. That next year is the year that we really saw results."

Overcoming Obstacles and Barriers

Filamena Leo, Administrative Assistant for Student Services, remembers the early days of the program. "At the time, I was the principal at La Joya Middle School," she says. "We had large numbers of students dropping out at the eighth- grade level—and that concerned me. Our overall dropout rate, at times, was as high as 40 percent. I said that we simply had to do whatever we could, using whatever means available to us to keep as many kids in school as possible."

The *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program came to Leo's attention through one of the directors of the Texas *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program, who suggested it to her because of his familiarity with the needs of her district's student population. The primary obstacle at the beginning, Leo recollects, was resistance and resentment from teachers who did not understand the program's goals—and were not sympathetic to the idea of singling out "problem" students for special attention. "They thought we were targeting kids who had not been successful in school and were rewarding them with a stipend," Leo states. "Today, there is a much more positive and accepting attitude. Teachers can see the changes in the kids who have gone through the program and recognize that it is a worthwhile activity."

Leo echoes Alaniz's observations about the incremental, positive changes in the students who participated in the Valued Youth Program. "The first change," she observes, "may not be empirical, but it was obvious. We saw more smiles. There were the students who always went around with slumped shoulders, who would not meet your eye. As a principal, I always stood in the hall during passing periods and spoke to each child. Many would not look at me or would not respond. After some time in the Valued Youth Program, they would smile, meet my eyes, and say: 'Good morning.'"

Other changes, she reports, could be seen when students would say with a newfound sense of purpose: "I can't be absent today. My tutee is waiting for me. Teachers noticed that students became more respectful in their classroom responses," she says. "Parents also told us that their children talked more openly to them. They were not as embarrassed about telling their parents things—and they helped out around the house more."

Creating a Sense of Purpose

Leo has no trouble responding to critics of the program. "My response to teachers who don't understand why we target these students for special attention has always been that *everyone* needs to feel valued. Everyone has something to offer. Yes, there are kids who have had some very bad experiences. These experiences have caused them to develop behaviors that some could say do not entitle them to anything we have to offer. But," she emphasizes, "we have to remember that they are seventh- and eighth-graders who perhaps have never been given the opportunity to demonstrate that they have something to give society. All they need is a chance to demonstrate that they can do it—and adequate support to get them to that point."

Advocating for Students and Developing Trust

Belief in her students spilled over into Alaniz's role as teacher and coordinator, pushing her to become their advocate with other school staff. When students saw that she stood up for them, they began to trust her. "Teachers would come to me and say they didn't want a particular student on field trips because he or she misbehaved. I would point out that the student behaved in *my* class; his work was good, he was taking his job very seriously. I would say: *All* students need to go on this field trip."

Alaniz continues, "Some of them had never been on a field trip because they were always in trouble. We took them on several field trips of our own and suddenly they were able to go on their classroom field trips. This was an enormous boost for them because they were accepted with the other kids. These field trips and other activities offer all the social things middle schoolers need. Instead, they were punished—and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy."

At one point near the beginning of the program, Alaniz was especially frustrated. "I talked to Mrs. Leo," she remembers, "and told her: 'I have all these kids who have problems. All they see is each other. They do not have any role models.' Feeling a different approach was warranted, Alaniz asked permission to bring in five more students who were active in student activities but still had environmental characteristics in common with her students. "Some came from migrant homes or had other difficulties. But they were very well-behaved: they had good grades. The result was almost immediate. Bus trips suddenly became quiet. My students began socializing with these other students. Everything calmed down."

After that, the program's emphasis shifted back to the students considered especially fragile—but with a new mindset. "I changed the emphasis of the program to make these students believe that they themselves were role models. We provided lots of opportunities for them to interact with others. For example, we had banquets where they would give speeches. They would talk about their work, their teachers, their parents. Kids would break down and cry when they talked about how they had let their parents and teachers down. They started to value themselves. They began to develop a conscience."

Achieving Positive Attitude Shifts

To Alaniz, shaping the attitudes of students who have been burned by negative experiences with adults and schools is perhaps the most critical part of any improvement or retention effort. "Many of our students identified as at risk don't see adults as human beings," she notes. "They see us as tyrants who push them around—tyrants with no feelings of our own. After my own son suffered a serious accident, I began to explain to them what had happened in my family and I broke down. When I looked up, I saw that each student was crying. It had clicked that I had emotions, I had feelings—and I was an adult, a teacher. They started to share things with me about themselves that were phenomenal. They began to be willing to show their vulnerability."

Because of events in students' lives—some quite tragic—many of Alaniz's students carried a white-hot anger within them, she says. The close knit quality of the program allowed them a safe place to ventilate their feelings and seek more positive outcomes for themselves.

Financial Incentives

Students who participate in the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program receive a modest stipend as payment for tutoring younger students. Alaniz explains how they chose to spend their money. "We had a field trip to a mall. Many had never been to a mall. Can you imagine this?" she asks. "It was heartbreaking to see them buying clothes for their sisters and brothers, buying shoes and pants and coming back to school with these bags of clothing. They were excited because they were taking something home for their families. Some of the kids saved their money and gave it to their parents. No one spent the money foolishly. Here were kids who had been identified as hard core juvenile delinquents who were using their money to buy useful things for their families."

Although the stipend was a key motivator at the beginning of the program, students eventually lost interest in the financial aspect of it. "At first, it was: 'When are we going to get paid?' Now, they don't ask me for their checks. One student from Mexico came to me and said she really didn't need the check. She said: 'Ms. Alaniz, this is too important to me. I am not going to take the money.' And she didn't."

Tutors and Tutees: Building Relationships of Value

The most profound change occurred through the relationships that developed between the tutors and their tutees, Alaniz emphasizes. "The kids become completely different when they work with the little ones," she says softly. "They tuck their shirts in, they take off their earrings. They wash their hands in case they have any markings on them. The little kids call them 'Sir' and 'Miss,'" she explains. "When you watch them together, it looks like a brother and sister interacting. Sometimes the little ones will scoot over, put their heads on the shoulder of their tutors, and say: 'I can't do it.' The tutor will put the tutee's little hand in his own hand and help them form the letters."

Along with a newfound sense of responsibility and trust were gains in English language proficiency, with the younger children who are being tutored and with the tutors themselves. "At first we didn't accept students into the program, who were classified as limited English proficient," she recollects. "But I had five students from Mexico who wanted to be in the program. As I watched my students work with the little kids, I saw that those who spoke English were speaking Spanish because some of the little ones were from Mexico. So I brought the students from Mexico into the program and their vocabulary grew rapidly. Within two months they were speaking English."

Setting Standards for Behavior and Academic Work

Although the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program offers warmth and support to students considered especially at risk, it also places demands for their behavior and academic performance. Participation is not a given; students must meet the program's standards in order to stay.

"We had kids who were failing four or five out of their six classes," Leo says. "We saw that failure rate drop to two classes after a semester of being in the program. They knew that maintaining a passing level was a key criterion for staying in the program. They also became more confident in themselves as learners and began to believe in themselves a little bit more."

Students are selected to participate in the program through a combination of teacher recommendations, a review of students' school history, their pattern of attendance over the years, and an assessment of their academic achievement. The Valued Youth teacher/coordinator and campus counselor narrow the pool of students down to the number the program can accept. Families are informed about the program, although parental permission to participate is not sought.

How is the program presented to prospective participants? Is there any stigma attached to participation?

Leo sighs. "Some do take offense when told they are considered to be at risk. We begin by having the Valued Youth Program teacher meet with them to explain the program. She presents it in a positive way, saying that they have not had such an opportunity before in school and we want to make sure that they do have it. Most students were receptive to that, but sometimes other students would make comments to them that they were selected to be in this program because they were failures or because they had never done anything in their lives.

"We try to prevent this stigma," Leo continues, "and we never have had a student who declined to participate. But we have had some question us: 'Why am I here? Am I a bad kid?' This clearly pains Leo, who again tries to turn to the positive. "We say: 'Yes, you have had some difficulty but we want to change that for you. Do you want to change? Do you want a shot at turning things around for yourself?'" She asks, "Who can say no to the chance to have a better life?"

Benefits of the Program

Leo's words tumble over themselves when she talks about the benefits of the program. "Kids who never have had an opportunity to show their good side are given a chance to do so. Adults begin to see them in a different light because their behaviors change as a result of seeing that they are important to someone else, to the little kids that they tutor. The validation that they receive is a powerful tool for changing human behavior. As they begin to see themselves differently, others do as well: teachers, parents, and siblings. With very few exceptions, there is a positive change in behavior. We have removed a very few youngsters from the program, less than five in the three middle schools that participated in the program last year."

Leo likes to illustrate the program's power by relating the story of one student. "One young woman, as a seventh-grader, was in the office an average of three times a week. When she came to middle school, the elementary school counselor who had worked with her a great deal said to me: 'You are getting a student I have tried very hard to keep in school. You'll be lucky if you keep her another six weeks.' We worked with her in the program, taking it a day at a time. This year, she will graduate from high school."

Alaniz agrees. "If I won the lottery," she states, "I would teach only in the Valued Youth Program, four classes a day. The program has done as much for me as for the students. I was humbled by it. It made me a better person, it made me more patient, and it made me more understanding."

Project *AVID*: Mar Vista High School and Mt. Pleasant High School

Project *AVID* (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a program designed for secondary-level youth in grades 6-12 to enhance their likelihood of enrolling in a four-year college or university. Average students believed to have college potential are placed in college preparatory courses, and in their *AVID* classes they receive the necessary supports and techniques that will enable them to succeed academically.

AVID was founded in 1980 by two English teachers at Clairemont High School in San Diego, California, with the goal of improving the academic achievement of minority students who did not appear to be preparing adequately, or achieving at sufficiently high enough levels, to gain entrance to four-year colleges or universities.

AVID is carefully structured to include a schoolwide team that is put into place at the outset of a school's decision to embark upon the program. Teams are composed of the school principal, head counselor, *AVID* teacher, and teachers in English, foreign languages, history, science, and mathematics. This comprehensive team receives one week of training in the summer, plus monthly follow-up training provided by *AVID* lead teachers and/or regional *AVID* centers. Schoolwide teams are key to the program's success, since teachers in different content areas, along with the principal and counselor, understand the program's goals and structure.

Specific instructional methodologies are central to *AVID*. They include: collaborative learning groups, inquiry and Socratic instructional approaches, and writing to facilitate learning . Tutoring in areas where students experience trouble is also a key component of the program. *AVID* classes are regularly scheduled classes and are offered in elective periods.

The *AVID* teacher/coordinator plays a critical role in the program's success, coaching students and functioning as their advocate. *AVID* students are selected by *AVID* teachers/coordinators; criteria include average to high California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) scores, parental consent, and low or average grades in school. The students *AVID* targets—that is, students whose grades do not match their potential as evidenced by standardized test scores—are disengaging from school. By showing them that college is a viable option for their future and by making school an integral part of preparing for that future, *AVID* helps to reconnect these students to learning. It also helps to improve their academic achievement so that college entrance is indeed viable.

College enrollment rates for *AVID* students are impressive, especially when one considers that it recruits students who would not normally be placed in the college track of their high schools. In 1996, the program served over 20,000 students Hispanic and nonHispanic students in 134 high schools around the country, including 50 high schools in San Diego County. Since 1990, over 5,000 students have graduated from *AVID* programs. Over 90 percent of *AVID* graduates enroll in college, with over 60 percent enrolling in four-year colleges (*AVID*, 1996).

AVID's accomplishments have been recognized by awards that include the Salute to Excellence Award for Staff Development and Leadership from the National Council of States on In-service Education, the Dana Foundation Award for Pioneering Achievement in Education, and the "A" Award from the U.S. Department of Education for Efforts to Reach the National Education Goals.

To tell the story of the *AVID* experience, we focus on two high schools: Mt. Pleasant High School in the East Side Union High School District in San Jose, California, and Mar Vista High School in Imperial Beach, California. Mt. Pleasant High School has a total student population of approximately 2,000; 90 students are currently enrolled in its *AVID* program. About 33 percent of Mt. Pleasant's students are classified as limited English proficient; approximately 34 percent receive free or reduced lunch; 44 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent are Asian, 18 percent are white, 14 percent are Filipino, and 6 percent are African American.

Mt. Pleasant enjoys some support for its *AVID* program beyond what typical *AVID* programs receive. Because the middle school that feeds into Mt. Pleasant High School also has an *AVID* program, students who will enter *AVID* at Mt. Pleasant typically have some prior experience and familiarity with its goals and structure. Many teachers at Mt. Pleasant High School, in addition to the regular *AVID* staff and *AVID* team, have received *AVID* training and are sympathetic to its goals and methods.

Mar Vista High School is located in the most southwestern city of the continental United States: Imperial Beach, California. Its student population numbers approximately 1,700 students. Close to 63 percent are Hispanic, mostly Mexican American, and 25 percent are white; smaller percentages of students are African American, Pacific Islander, and Filipino. Approximately 30 percent of the school's Hispanic student population is classified as LEP. Mar Vista High School is in its eighth year of *AVID* implementation.

In this chapter, *AVID* program staff from both high schools discuss the key components of the program, and how it has benefit their students.

- Grettel Castro Stanley is the *AVID* coordinator/teacher at Mt. Pleasant High School in San Jose, California.

- Alice Esparza is the *AVID* coordinator/teacher at Mar Vista High School in San Diego, California.

- Elizabeth Vega is a senior at the University of California at San Diego. A graduate of Mar Vista High School, she works as a tutor in the *AVID* program.

"What I love about *AVID*," Grettel Castro Stanley says with enthusiasm, "is the way in which it addresses exactly what students are doing in each of their classes. In our *AVID* classes, we constantly examine each student's progress. We want to know how our students are doing in foreign languages, algebra, science—all of their classes. We then help them with their deficits. Not only do we work with students academically, but we also examine some of the social issues that may keep them from succeeding. It is an approach that not only focuses on the whole child, but also on the whole realm of academics."

Mt. Pleasant High School is in its third year of *AVID* implementation, Castro Stanley explains. "We begin with freshmen, who are *AVID* I students, move them along as sophomores into *AVID* II, then as juniors into *AVID* III, and then as seniors into *AVID* IV—and then they graduate. Meanwhile, each year we start another *AVID* class at the freshmen level."

Castro Stanley's role as the *AVID* teacher/coordinator illustrates the rigors of the work. "I become each student's personal counselor," she explains. "I monitor their progress and their grades, and work as their advocate with other teachers. But our approach is a team approach."

It is typical for *AVID* teachers to go the extra mile to ensure that students receive any help that will ease their chances of attaining academic success. For instance, it is not unusual for these teachers to drive a student to an evening tutoring session that will give that student the extra push to succeed in algebra. "We have one senior in the program who has four brothers and sisters," Castro Stanley says. "Her mother works very hard and is never home. The daughter takes all the children to school, gets them dressed, and does everything to take care of them because her mom is not home to do it. She is also trying to do the academics she needs in order to get into a four-year college. We have lots of students in that boat," she notes. "Lots and lots of them. "Sometimes we pick these students up ourselves and take them to an off campus tutorial. At least this gives them two hours of extra tutoring once a week. But it is a struggle, and it is an individual struggle, one-on-one."

Seeing Progress, Viewing Results

During the 1996-97 academic year, Castro Stanley saw the first results with Mt. Pleasant's *AVID* III class of ten, a mix of juniors and seniors. "Out of ten students," she says, "we will see nine go on to a four-year or a two-year college."

AVID's practicality and low cost appeal to Castro Stanley, who sees the high cost of many other programs and the difficulties of implementation as significant barriers for many schools, particularly at the secondary level. "*AVID* is very inexpensive," she says. "Frequently, there are special monies for special programs, such as limited grants—and when the money is taken away, the program dies."

Another advantage, she believes, is that *AVID*'s goals and aims extend—tentacle like—into the curriculum of the entire school. This extension of the original program allows other students—especially those who might otherwise drop out—to benefit from the program. "For us, it has become an incredible way of restructuring our school without calling it restructuring. All of our teachers like it so much that they are using a great deal of its philosophy. They see that the methodologies used with *AVID* students are very well-organized and focused. Actually, these are basic skills that should be taught from day one but for some reason, we lose them along the way."

Alice Esparza has similar positive sentiments about *AVID*, which she has worked with since 1988 at Mar Vista High School. "When we began," she remembers, "we focused [on] the students in the middle in terms of their grades— since *AVID* was designed specifically for those students in the middle for whom an adequate amount of support could turn them into students who go on to four-year colleges. Our *AVID* students were those whose teachers thought they had potential, whose test scores showed potential, but who had average or mediocre grades."

Like all *AVID* coordinators, Esparza is savvy about college entrance requirements. Because Mar Vista is located in California, she is especially aware of the entrance requirements of the University of California system. "Our *AVID* students suffer from a general lack of preparation—and that could interfere with going on to college. The University of California system, for instance, has a very specific sequence of classes that students must take to be admitted. If they are missing any of them, they will not be accepted."

Academic Demands and Adequate Support

Aren't college preparatory classes too demanding if students lack adequate preparation? How does the *AVID* program provide adequate support to ensure students' needs are met?

Esparza responds, "Twice a week our students meet with tutors. In our program, these tutors are students at local universities. I prefer that they are graduates of the school because if they are, they know both the teachers and many of the kids in the area." These students, she continues, are excellent role models who provide a concrete sense of what the future might be for Mar Vista's *AVID* students if they succeed in the program. "They might live down the street from some of our students. They are familiar with the neighborhoods. In these tutoring groups, our students discuss their classes with the tutors, bringing up the points that they do not understand or that are giving them difficulty."

At Mt. Pleasant High School, tutoring is offered in a daily morning period between 8 and 8:30 a.m. "This is open to the entire school," Castro Stanley observes, "not solely *AVID* students. But our *AVID* students must attend it four days a week as part of the contract they sign to be in the program. If they are behind in any subject, there are individual teachers who will help them. Most of our *AVID* students attend all five days of the week. In addition to that, during the *AVID* period, they receive tutoring two days a week from San Jose State University students. These university level tutors help them academically and socially."

To provide yet another academic boost, Mt. Pleasant uses a program developed on site by the *AVID* team. Castro Stanley calls it "shadowing." "Shadowing," she explains, means that San Jose State tutors follow a student experiencing difficulty in a particular class for a week, listening and observing diagnostically to uncover the reason that the student is faltering academically.

"The tutor goes to the problem class with the student, sits with her, and takes notes alongside the student," Castro Stanley says. "The tutor tries to figure out what is lacking, where the problem lies. We find out amazing things through the feedback of the tutor. Sometimes we find out that the student falls asleep—and that is why she is failing. Sometimes the fault lies in the teaching, because it is inadequate. The shadowing component has provided us with some tremendous insights that we use to make necessary changes. Once we know what is going on, we can come up with a plan."

The Use of Tutors

Because Mar Vista has been working with *AVID* since 1988, it has been able to see its own graduates return to the program as college tutors. While a senior at the University of California at San Diego, Elizabeth Vega, an *AVID* graduate from Mar Vista, tutored in her alma mater's *AVID* program. She brought a special understanding of, and empathy for, the students enrolled in the *AVID* program. She also was a clear model of success—carrying a double major in political science and French literature and a minor in economics.

Vega believes her familiarity with the neighborhood and the needs of students is a plus that helps students relate to her and her own academic success. "The neighborhood here is economically disadvantaged," she says. "Sometimes a kid needs to see that there are other things out there. It is good for them to see somebody who came out of the same place, is doing well in college, and who studies with them to help them do it too."

Did she think she would go to college when she was in high school? "It was at the back of my mind," Vega responds thoughtfully, "but *AVID* gave me the skills, the help, and the information I needed to get into college. One of the main problems for students is not knowing which courses to take or how to prepare for exams. *AVID* gave me that. *AVID* also helped me to make my goals very specific and target my activities and classes toward those goals."

Tutoring is tightly structured, Esparza agrees, and needs to be to ensure academic success. "The tutors are trained either by the *AVID* teacher or by the county office of education. They are trained especially in the Socratic method of instruction, rather than didactic lectures. They dialogue with students."

Maintaining a constant eye on the future guides their efforts. "We know," Esparza says, "that once they are in college they are going to be on their own. They need to start relying on each other. Twice a week, they work in their discussion groups with their tutors on different subjects. The point of that is to improve their grades so they can be admitted to a four-year college. The other two days a week we teach an extensive curriculum that deals with college study skills, especially note taking and writing, and we study for the SAT."

Flexibility and Personalization

Another key to the *AVID* program lies in its flexibility and personalization to the individual student. "Many things happen that affect achievement," Castro Stanley says. "[We] switch students' schedules if there is a real personality conflict with a teacher that cannot be resolved. Or our principal, who is very supportive of the program, intervenes."

Constant, relentless monitoring of individual students—even of the most minute details—is also necessary, she asserts. "We collect all the note taking that students do in all of their classes on a weekly basis—which they compile in binders. In that way, we can monitor their progress and see if some learning is actually taking place. Some students decide they don't want to be bothered. Maybe they have never had much responsibility and find this difficult."

But there are consequences in the *AVID* program. "If they don't turn in their binders, I meet with them in a small group. A parent then must check the binder on the day before we collect them and write us a note attesting that the student did his work. That pushes parental involvement."

This type of scrutiny can demand a great deal from *AVID* teachers, she reports—pointing to one teacher who was determined to get her freshman *AVID* students on task. "She called 30 sets of parents almost every day for six weeks," Castro Stanley says. "She gave them good news, bad news, whatever news she could. After six weeks of struggle, the light bulb went on and the kids quit fighting her. They started to say: 'I can do this.'"

Future-Oriented Activities and Field Trips

Keeping a concrete sense of the future visible, immediate, and tangible is a critical component of *AVID*. Field trips to colleges are planned carefully, Esparza says, "to demystify college. We will go to a college and they will actually attend classes. We have guest speakers from different ethnic groups who come in and talk about their professions, what they do every day on their jobs, what they had to do in terms of education to get that job."

If necessary, *AVID* teachers will intervene to lessen or mitigate negative peer influences that pull students from their academic goals. "We try to restructure their peer groups," Esparza says. "We emphasize team building through activities, including role playing. This is especially important because our kids are dealing with other kids who aren't preparing for college, who aren't going on after high school to anything in particular. We get them to focus on how they talk to other adolescents, how they respond to them if their pressure is negative. We encourage them to think a lot about who they are and where they belong. We let them know that if they are going to go to college, they need the support of certain people."

Partnerships with universities help students stay focused on their academic goals, Castro Stanley believes. "Going to universities and having college students here as tutors and role models really motivates the kids," she points out. "Field trips are also very important. The more we expose them to the future, the more they stay on track. We have taken them to Berkeley, to Santa Barbara, to Santa Clara University, to the University of California at Davis. Eventually we will go on an overnight trip where they will spend the night in a dorm."

Ease of Implementation

One of *AVID*'s unheralded benefits is its ease of implementation. Rather than being opposed to it, teachers welcome it. "We never, ever had to sell the program to our staff," Castro Stanley maintains. "Of course, you must have the support of your administration, and we have fantastic support from our principal. The teamwork is outstanding. The teachers who work in the program are dedicated to it. Programs like these," she says, "can have problems becoming institutionalized in high schools. Our experience, however, with *AVID* has been that it has become institutionalized through ongoing training for more and more teachers, through its interdisciplinary nature, and through its methodologies—which teachers believe in."

When not only students, but teachers, can benefit from a program, its positive effects are very clear, Castro Stanley asserts. "Teachers like this program so much that they start using it without knowing it. They see it as a wonderful, powerful tool to affect learning. I still teach Spanish, but I use the *AVID* methodologies with every one of my Spanish students, although they are not in *AVID*. As a result, everybody succeeds, and that is exciting."

Recommendations

- Schools should implement a program that fits the needs of the school or district Hispanic population. Options can emphasize developing a viable future for students who would not attend college without special academic and social support, or on building the self-worth and efficacy of students through cross-age tutoring or similar programs.
- Target those secondary-level staff most attuned to individual and collaborative group work and comfortable with diversity, and make them school leaders in programmatic responses and preventive approaches to the Hispanic dropout rate.
- Recognize and celebrate small initial successes as the building blocks to a long-term, successful program. Allow sufficient time to work through early snags in implementation and regard early glitches as opportunities to "fine tune" the program to the district's or school's needs.
- Allow an effective program's results to speak for themselves, drawing in the support of previously skeptical school staff as they see progress. Publicize and disseminate results adequately to school staff, parents, the school board, local community leaders, and the media. Disseminate bilingual information; also try atypical means of dissemination, such as radio announcements in Spanish and English.
- Enlist parental support at the beginning of the program; however, persist with programmatic efforts even if parents lack initial enthusiasm. Communicate fully with parents and enlist them as allies in their children's progress.
- Confront students' lack of progress or failure to meet academic and behavioral standards immediately, meeting with them to diagnose the problem and devise a strategy for the student to pursue and the teacher to monitor.
- Emphasize empowerment for students through the attainment of knowledge, appropriate behavior, and social skills. Wherever possible, avoid reinforcing feelings of powerlessness or victimization; focus on "can do" strategies that will build personal efficacy.

CHAPTER SIX

Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth

In previous chapters, we have focused on schools and programs that have demonstrated success with innovative solutions to the Hispanic dropout problem. Clearly, schools can make a pivotal difference in the lives of Hispanic students. In these accounts of effective practices, educators, community members, college students, and Hispanic youth worked together toward goals that include high investment in learning and achievement. As part of this process, nurturing relationships between school staff and students connect youth to school and to the promise of a better future.

Unfortunately, these positive experiences are far too infrequent for Hispanic youth. While some schools and districts have succeeded—frequently against seemingly insurmountable odds— in bringing about high-quality educational experiences for Hispanic youth, the majority of schools with high concentrations of Hispanic youth have not been as successful. In fact, most schools serving Hispanic youth need dramatic restructuring, innovation, and change—perhaps most immediately, an infusion of hope combined with practical ideas—in order to serve those youth severely at risk of dropping out.

In this final chapter, we shift our emphasis to unenlightened school practices and attitudes that actually encourage Hispanic youth to drop out, broad recommendations for change, and the immediate steps that schools can take to address the Hispanic dropout problem. Four members of the HDP summarize their observations about schooling for Hispanic students in the United States, and recommend key changes for educational practice and policy. Such changes, they contend, not only will improve the educational experience for Hispanic students, but also will bond Hispanic youth to school and lessen the likelihood that they will drop out and face limited futures. Findings from the HDP emphasize that ineffective school practices need not continue, that necessary changes lie well within the grasp of educators.

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- Rudolfo Chávez-Chávez is a Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at New Mexico State University. He currently serves on the editorial board of *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, the Board of Examiners for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and as an at-large board member for the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME).

- Jeannie Oakes is Professor of Education and Assistant Dean in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles where she directs Center X (Where Research and Practice Intersect for Urban School Professionals).

Her writing and research target inequalities in the allocation of resources and learning opportunities in U.S. schools, and also the progress of equity-minded reform.

- Robert E. Slavin is Codirector of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk at Johns Hopkins University. The author or coauthor of more than 180 articles and 15 books, he received the American Educational Research Association's Raymond B. Cattell Early Career Award for Programmatic Research in 1986, the Palmer O. Johnson Award for the best article in an AERA journal in 1988, and the Charles A. Dana Award in 1994.

For many Hispanic students who attend school in the United States, school is a punishing place, one they understandably are eager to leave. As HDP Director Walter Secada observes, dropping out can seem like a logical response to poor instruction and unsafe, dirty, and overcrowded schools.

Rudolfo Chávez-Chávez agrees, pointing to grim demographics to illustrate the results of faulty instructional and structural practices. "Forty percent of Latino students leave school prior to graduation," he says. "Thirty-five percent of Latino students are held back at least one grade. Forty-seven percent of Latino students are overage by grade 12."

What school-based factors lead to such statistics? HDP members concur that a constellation of elements contributes to the high dropout rate—including poor instruction, a lack of high-quality bilingual education programs, tracking, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher preparation or professional development.

The Quality of Instruction

Frequently, HDP members observe, Hispanic students are alienated from school by insensitive, unresponsive, or low-quality instruction. "When we interviewed Latino students and their parents in our work with the Hispanic Dropout Project," Secada says, "they were very emphatic that the quality of instruction in their schools was boring and unchallenging."

The dismissive attitudes of some teachers did not encourage many Hispanic students to participate in their classes. Such attitudes did send a definite, direct message that Hispanic students were not valued in the school. "The students we talked to complained about asking questions and not having those questions answered," Secada adds, "and they felt that teachers frequently dismissed their concerns and the things they didn't understand." These experiences, Secada emphasizes, are far from trivial because they lead, almost inexorably, to devastating consequences. "We know that poor instruction results in low achievement," he points out. "That is one fundamental reason students drop out of school."

Another reason Hispanic students fail to graduate can be found in instructional practices that take a "sink or swim" attitude toward second language acquisition, or that completely negate students' native culture. Many educators, HDP members concur, do not believe that Hispanic students can succeed academically because of their lack of proficiency in English, or because of

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damaging cultural stereotypes about Hispanics that maintain they are less interested in education than other ethnic groups. As a result, even well-intentioned educators may hold low expectations for Hispanic students.

These low expectations, Chávez-Chávez says, blunt Hispanic students' chances of attaining academic success as well as their sense of self-efficacy. "Too often these students are not treated in a way that signals dignity, respect, and authentic caring," Chávez-Chávez emphasizes.

The Role of Bilingual Education

While some students who speak Spanish do receive excellent bilingual instruction, many more are enrolled in bilingual programs that are out-of-date. Some bilingual educators, Chávez-Chávez says, have not kept current with state-of-the-art knowledge about second language acquisition and practice.

The length of time it takes to acquire and learn a second language—if taught well—requires a long, consistent effort, Chávez-Chávez emphasizes. If schools shift students out of bilingual education too early, the solid linguistic foundation that aids further learning is truncated. "Schools are basically language-based," Chávez-Chávez notes. "So much learning occurs through language that students who aren't provided with a supportive language acquisition environment are assessed and labeled as remedial. This is why special education programs in the Southwest are overrepresented with Latino and Latina students."

Hispanic students who enter school speaking English may face problems as well. "Teachers and other school staff," Chávez-Chávez explains, "quickly assume that because these students speak English they have the same type of cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences that European Americans have. As a result, the distinct culture they bring with them is not valued or nurtured by the school." These students often internalize school attitudes toward Hispanic students and turn their backs on their own culture. "Many buy into the notion that their culture is less," Chávez-Chávez says sadly. "Cultural experiences that make learning come alive are not celebrated nor pedagogically embraced."

The Effects of Tracking

Just as inadequate or antiquated bilingual education can contribute to Hispanic students' alienation from school, another common school practice—tracking—contributes to the low quality of instruction they frequently receive. Cultural stereotypes about Hispanic children contribute to their disproportionate representation in low tracks, Jeannie Oakes contends. "Our cultural biases say that Hispanic students probably aren't as bright or as motivated as other children, or value education as much. These prejudices often lead teachers to make decisions about what curriculum and instruction the children should have—and these decisions really diminish the quality of their experience in school."

As a result, Hispanic students frequently are assigned to low tracks, where the instruction they receive is slower in pace and remedial in nature. Often, their teachers are either less experienced or less competent than teachers assigned to higher track classes.

"For example," Oakes observes, 'very young children who are in the low-reading group in first grade will be exposed to fewer words, have less time to read in class, and often will experience frequent interruptions and distractions in their reading instruction—either from the teacher or from other children. They end up with less time to learn to read than do other children." She adds, "From the very beginning, the quality of their instruction and their exposure to knowledge is less than children of higher groups."

Low-track placement has other negative effects—including the fact that often students believe that they are to blame for the poor education they receive. "In the study that resulted in my book, *Keeping Track*," Oakes continues, "I was struck by the fact that so many students expressed a belief that the school was okay. They saw themselves as the source of the problem. Of course, we know that individuals are not without responsibility for much of what happens to them. However, these individuals seemed to have no sense that they had been treated unfairly by the school system, or that they had been given less than other students. There is a vulnerability that comes along with being stereotyped. In fact, the internalization of stereotypes by the people who have been stereotyped is one of the most pernicious aspects of racism. You come to see that what happens to you is something you deserve. We can't overlook this. It is a very powerful factor in the high rate of dropping out that we see among Hispanic students. "

Resources and Physical Conditions

Not only is the quality of instruction many Hispanic students receive substandard, it is frequently delivered in physical environments that beg for improvement. Typically, schools with high concentrations of Hispanic students are in large cities where it is not uncommon for the halls and classrooms to be dirty, the plumbing inadequate, and violence a constant, threatening presence. Clearly, these conditions are not conducive to the sort of work environments in which teachers can summon their best practice. "There are many contributing factors to poor instruction, some very obvious," Secada notes. "Classrooms in many, many schools are terribly overcrowded. They may be dirty. They may be unsafe."

These physical conditions, he maintains, are beyond the control of teachers—but significantly affect their daily practice. "For example, one Latino girl told us that she raises her hand in class but feels bad about asking questions—because there are so many kids in the classroom that the teacher can't possibly get to her. Another student talked about trying to get help after school and being shrugged off by the teacher. These interactions are not inconsequential, because there is an immediacy associated with needing help."

Perhaps most alarming, school staff who work in resource-starved schools themselves struggle to survive in the classroom—and this has profound effects on how they teach. "Instruction in these settings becomes depersonalized," Secada explains. "A type of instructional triage goes on [as] adults tend to those students most likely to succeed. They simply do not have the time or energy to attend to others. Students—particularly those with pressing needs—are perceived as ciphers."

Investing New Resources

Is it possible for schools to do more with existing funds, or will real reform for Hispanic students demand massive infusions of money?

Secada believes that a targeted investment of significant new resources is necessary. "At many schools that we visited," he recollects, "we heard how school staff were living a hand-to-mouth existence. Schools that were trying to do the best they could to help kids just didn't have adequate support." Money does matter, Secada argues. "Some people contend that just pouring money into schools will not result in high-quality education, good relationships between adults and students, and personalization of the entire educational experience," he explains. "Those people should send their children to the schools many Hispanic youth attend."

Schools suffering from insufficient resources may engage in creative fundraising strategies to support good programs. While such strategies may result in badly needed additional funds, they impinge upon teachers' instructional time, diverting them from their primary responsibilities. Or, when faced with inadequate resources, schools subtly—or not so subtly—encourage students to drop out to ease their burden. "We need to recognize," Secada emphasizes, "that many schools already engage in activities that help them deal with financial stress—and many of these strategies help kids drop out of school."

What happens if schools receive additional infusions of resources? What safeguards need to be present to ensure that those resources will, in fact, result in high-quality instruction for Hispanic youth?

"If we do support schools with new resources, we have to be careful," Secada warns. "Schools have been coping up until now. With more money, they are not necessarily going to change. They may continue their old behaviors, the coping behaviors. But clear linkages between monies infused into schools and the quality of instruction students receive need to be high on the agendas of both educators and policymakers. "High-quality instruction," Secada points out, "requires additional resources to accomplish smaller class sizes, an end to overcrowded schools, improved materials, and high-quality professional development. Money definitely is necessary, but it must support specific activities."

Achieving Attitudinal Shifts

While physical changes will aid instruction, attitudinal shifts are also necessary. "Teachers have to take kids seriously; they have to take Hispanic kids and their futures seriously," Secada insists. Teachers also can be challenged to think differently about what and how they teach, he says. "We can suggest to English teachers that they include books written by Latino authors that deal with the realities of the Latino world. We can encourage them to discard other books that are not as relevant, as worthwhile. We can ask social studies teachers to bring in history books that contain the history of the Southwest so that Latinos understand their role in the development and growth of the Southwest."

But teachers alone cannot carry the full load of curriculum and materials development, he asserts. Textbook publishers need to produce culturally relevant materials, and communities and school boards must invest in appropriate materials for school staff.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Respecting the culture and language of Hispanic students has both immediate and long-term implications for universities and schools of education, Secada adds. "Schools of education need to produce a workforce that can meet what our diversified population says it needs," he states. "Teachers do need to have technical training on how to teach, but we must diversify the teacher workforce ethnically by personal background characteristics."

A lack of knowledge about how to teach in a multicultural, culturally relevant way is a common and prevailing impediment to high-quality education for Hispanic students, Chávez-Chávez maintains. "When you don't know how to teach in this way, you rely on how you were taught. We all carry baggage with us based on how we were schooled. We think we know how to teach, but our knowledge is passive. Soon, however, this passive knowledge is elevated to become everyday teaching knowledge, and dangerously, it becomes the norm."

What about in-service training? How do schools retool their professional development so that it builds a knowledge base for teachers who work with Hispanic students? Where do schools begin?

The first step, Chávez-Chávez says, requires students to understand at a deep level that we live and work in a multicultural world. The next step is to assess teachers' understanding of how different students learn. "You must know what kind of training or education your teachers need," he says. "You also need a good demographic profile of how many Latino and Latina students are going to college and how many are not—and genuinely want to know why. You need to hear the personal stories of students throughout the grade levels so you can have a narrative profile that shows what makes that particular student community unique. In turn, you need to create learning opportunities that integrate culture and language."

School boards and communities must also be educated about the length of time any substantive endeavor will require—because in-depth, long-lasting change requires time, continuous refinement, and sustained financial support. "There must be a core of people who bring the change about," Chávez-Chávez observes, "but it must include support staff, faculty, custodians, community members, parents, other community agencies—a collaborative endeavor. There must be a sense that everybody can succeed and everybody must believe it."

And when schools detrack their instruction, Oakes says, teachers need to be taught to revamp traditional modes of instruction as well—so that they can teach heterogeneous groups successfully. "We found that when teachers worked together, shared their plans and their resources, and sometimes even shared their space," Oakes notes, "this helped a great deal in their work with students in a variety of grouping patterns."

Fewer students also boosts the quality of instruction, she believes. "Teachers need to work with smaller numbers of students at any one time in secondary schools. As one example, some high schools have gone to some type of block scheduling, which reduces the number of students they interact with in any one day."

Educational Innovations: Guidelines for Schools

Although many HDP recommendations are broad-based and call for concerted action sustained over time on a variety of fronts, there are immediate steps that schools can take to combat the Hispanic dropout problem. Some schools, as described in earlier chapters, use a variety of programs to engage Hispanic students in school and bond them to adults.

Given the availability of effective programs that combat the Hispanic dropout rate, or that can be used to that end, what are common obstacles to implementation? Why don't more schools take advantage of existing programs?

Robert Slavin points first to cost, a frequently perceived barrier to program implementation. "Many programs," Slavin says, "are not costly in the context of what schools spend, but schools perceive themselves to have very limited discretionary money. A typical elementary school spends three million dollars a year. Hardly any innovation would cost that school more than fifty-thousand dollars." Yet fifty thousand out of three million, he points out, can seem like a fortune to a principal who is trying to find it in a tightly committed budget.

Another obstacle to implementing effective programs is the amount of serious work they require. "American schools value involvement in innovation in a positive way," Slavin notes. "Often schools will claim to be involved in an innovation but in fact they are not. Frequently, educators shop for the most appealing innovation that doesn't require them to actually do anything. That is a very special case of resistance to change. Change is threatening. Even though educators are under accountability pressures of one kind or another, their perception is that they can deal with those pressures through strategies that are immediately directed to the test score, rather than to a fundamental change in what they are doing."

A third obstacle to innovation is the school's very real fear that it will commit to a program and then lose the district's support after learning new techniques and instructional approaches. "That investment will be lost," Slavin says. "Schools get burned a lot in innovation. They often have long histories of promises of wonderful things that fall through. They don't get the resources or training they expected or they don't get the outcomes they expected. As a result, individual teachers as well as whole schools become cynical about innovation."

A limited capacity to distinguish good research from poor research adds to educators' cynicism, he believes. "They begin to take all claims with a heavy grain of salt or discount them completely. They haven't built up a serious belief system. If you don't believe something will work, you won't do it at all. If you do it, you will be very tentative. You will approach the innovation as one more ornament on the Christmas tree—not really fundamental to the school's purpose."

A lack of information to guide efforts to establish solid, effective educational programs that reduce the dropout rate is a major barrier to success. "There is a very fundamental lack of information about alternatives that work," Slavin notes. "Once that information is available, then there can be a lack of capacity or interest in finding out what the research says."

Slavin adds that the papers he coauthored for the HDP were an effort to provide assistance to principals, teachers, and district personnel. "We wanted to help them sift through the evidence and put it on a comparative scale, both in terms of the quality of the available evidence and the size of outcomes they might anticipate. It is very difficult for people in schools to get that type of comparative information."

Identifying and Implementing Effective Programs

How do educators identify solid programs? Are there any guidelines they can follow as they sort through the dizzying array of available alternatives? How do they recognize solid claims of success—and discard shaky proof of effectiveness?

"The programs that show positive effects," Robert Slavin says, "have several consistent aspects. To begin with, they are well-specified. They have specific training procedures, specific materials for teachers and for students, and very extensive and well-crafted professional development." In particular, the professional development offered by effective programs is well-crafted and coherent—tied closely to what teachers actually do in classrooms. It is also sustained over time, rather than offered as a series of disconnected, "one-shot" workshops with little connection to teachers' daily practice.

Another component of successful programs is their comprehensive nature. "The programs that make a big difference are those that are used in the entire school or entire department," Slavin maintains. "It is key that these programs are not marginal activities, but central to what people do."

Continuously monitoring student progress is yet another critical component of effective programs, Slavin points out. "Most effective models have some type of built-in assessment so that educators can determine in a timely fashion whether they are reaching their goals." For example, one component of *Success for All*, the school improvement program developed by Slavin and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins, is an assessment of students' reading at eight-week intervals. "We use these assessments," Slavin says, "as an internal check to assess whether a school is reaching the desired outcomes." In this way, he observes, school staff can adjust their activities and move quickly to provide needed support to students whose progress flags below program expectations.

Challenging Content and Valuable Relationships

Beyond the conditions of implementation—the nuts and bolts of effective programs—successful programs are distinguished from mediocre or ineffective programs through high-level, challenging content that emphasizes activity over passivity. "Programs that engage students actively in thinking activities, problem-solving activities, and creative activities that are very closely focused on the outcomes a school is trying to achieve are much more likely to succeed" Slavin explains.

Programs that show success with potential dropouts carry an extra component: warm relationships with adults, which help students to feel cared-about, valued, and nurtured. "Programs that work specifically for dropout prevention are those that accomplish several key motivational outcomes," he notes. "One is making kids feel cared for and personally connected to valued adults. There is a personal connection built into these programs that shows youth that someone cares about each student as an individual. That is very important, especially in secondary schools, where the danger is that a student can be lost in the shuffle."

Cultural aspects add weight to the need to feel valued, he contends. "It is especially important for Hispanic kids and for ethnic American kids to experience these relationships, because without them, it is very easy for these students to feel alienated, to feel that nobody really cares about people like them. If these kids, in particular, are not closely tied in a personal, caring sense to valued adults, there is a peer group that is all too ready to accept them and to move them out of the school—or out of the achieving part of the school."

Powerful, sustaining relationships lift Hispanic students out of a mentality where they may perceive themselves as hapless victims of powerful forces too large to contest. "Programs with this emphasis," Slavin continues, "also provide kids with a status, a sense that they are doing something that is very important. For example, the *Coca-Cola Valued Youth* Program has kids become cross-age tutors for younger kids. It is a very clever strategy. It says: You are not receiving services. You are not a victim that we are helping. You are not damaged goods that we are trying to nurture. You are a valuable person with something to contribute. Being a big buddy to your little buddy is a high-status activity."

In programs like *AVID*, where the emphasis is on academic performance and eventual college entrance, students achieve immediate status through placement in the top academic tracks. "There is a certain status to be found in the high track, Slavin points out. "People from colleges talk to you; you visit colleges; you are treated like somebody with a future, with promise. This is very important for all kids but especially for kids who can see all kinds of examples around them of kids who were not treated with respect—and who can readily identify with those examples."

Individualization and Personalization

In order for a program to engage students in school—thus blunting the forces that would encourage them to drop out—successful programs personalize instruction to meet student needs. "Successful programs," Slavin observes, "take kids as they are and move them forward rather than applying something that falls unequally on everyone."

Many errors result from an approach that is well-intentioned but neglects the delicate balance between a pace that is too demanding versus a remedial approach, he maintains. "You can go wrong with the approach that moves kids very slowly in the belief that a slow pace is all they can handle. Or you can fail by selecting high standards for all with no mechanisms that help kids to reach those high standards. There must be a balance between the two. The high standards need to be maintained but kids must be provided with what they need so that they can achieve those high standards within a reasonable period of time."

Time, Results, and Expectations

How long does it take, on average, for effective programs to show positive results? At what point should educators decide that a program needs more time and persistence—and when do they decide that a program simply isn't working?

"Programs vary a great deal on this," Slavin responds. "Some programs, such as Reading Recovery and *Success for All*, start in September of the academic year and expect a very rapid implementation. By midyear, you should see gains with these programs. Other programs take a much longer view and have a much longer planning and implementation process. It wouldn't be realistic to expect substantial gains until the second or third year."

He cautions against expecting gains on routinely administered standardized tests—which can take considerably longer than gains on more sensitive, classroom-based measures. "Sometimes immediate gains aren't visible the first year on standardized tests, partly because the standardized tests typically start in the third or fourth grade," he explains. "The accumulation of experiences that kids have over the first through third grade will register on that test. Therefore, if you begin with third- graders, you won't see the impact of a program. Similarly, with high school dropout prevention programs, there are years and years of bad experiences that kids have accumulated. Expecting a total turnaround in one year may be unrealistic even if the implementation is outstanding because there are so many years of prior experience to overcome."

What are normal snags school staff can anticipate with almost any program implementation—and what are red lights that should signal a program is in distress?

"The normal hassles," Slavin says pragmatically, "often relate to having teachers doing something different than what they have done for years. Expecting them to be perfect the first week of a new program is not realistic. There is a learning curve that has to be allowed, not years and years, but certainly within the early months. However, educators should be concerned if they don't see a progression over the course of the first year in the quality of the implementation. As long as they see progress in that, especially in the early months, they are probably in good shape.

"But they also should see a sense of commitment and enthusiasm from teachers. Teachers make their own decisions about whether a program is heading in the right direction or not. If they decide at some point in the year that it is not working, then the program is in deep trouble, even if it is working. In some ways, the teacher's perception is more important than whatever objective data is available."

For example, *Success for All* sometimes takes a vote from school staff midyear to find out if they want to continue with the program. "This is one way to discriminate between a squeaky wheel who is making a lot of noise and the great majority of staff who really don't want to do this," Slavin points out pragmatically. "Sometimes two teachers may be upset, and it may not have anything to do with the program. That can be dealt with. "But," he adds, "If you find that the majority of the staff are having serious difficulty with the program, that is another level of problem."

Ongoing, built-in assessments at frequent intervals also offer useful information. "With our program, if we have follow-ups with a school and the staff say: These kids come from very difficult families, they don't get much support at home, we have a lot of teachers who are new to the school, and that is why our scores are not moving along as they should, we have a basis to say: We have 50 schools with the same problems and they are doing a lot better than this. We know you can do a lot better. Let's see what the problem is with the program. "

Comprehensive Versus Limited Programs: Their Effectiveness

If a school decides to move ahead with a program that has a clearly defined but limited purpose, that is not a schoolwide, comprehensive program, to what extent is there a danger that the regular program will not make necessary changes schoolwide?

In his reply, Slavin points to school-within-a-school programs. "If you create a school-within-a-school program you create ins and outs. There are teachers who are part of the innovation and teachers who are not. Those who are not a part of the innovation not only don't join it, but also begin to oppose it and complain about how the program receives all the resources and attention. They often can wear it down over a period of time. One approach that can succeed is to divide the entire secondary school into academies. Everybody is involved in an innovation, but they are different innovations. In other words, people aren't pitted against one another. Another approach that can work is to involve a single department in a school in an innovation. This is difficult, because the other departments are jealous and complain about that department receiving resources and attention. But it can be done because the interpersonal connections teachers have in secondary schools are tied closely to the department, not to the school as a whole."

Considerations Prior to Program Implementation

If schools weigh the available evidence carefully and then decide to move ahead with a program with dropout prevention as one of its desired outcomes, what factors need to be in place before they can hope for success?

Slavin believes the most important factor is staff willingness to engage and invest their energies in the program. "In *Success for All*," he observes, "we require a vote of at least 80 percent by secret ballot of the school's staff to take on the program. Before taking the vote, we see that people have had an opportunity to look at videos, to visit other schools using the program, to debate among themselves if this matches their vision of where they want their school to go. It is very hard to make something work when it is pressed on teachers. People are naturally resistant to having something mandated for them."

Second, schools need resources to buy materials to support the program. "If schools can provide what will be needed," he points out, "it helps tremendously. Many teachers will go out and buy their own math manipulatives—out of their own money—because their districts are so slow in getting them. This erodes teachers' faith in the innovation and also makes it uneven, because some teachers will buy them and others won't."

Finally, effective programs require an adequate investment in high-quality professional development—one that is sustained over time. "Somebody," Slavin emphasizes, "has to arrange enough days for professional development and its follow-up to take place. If a school is not willing to pay for professional development, then it may be setting out on something that will fail. Or a project may have excellent materials, but a school purchases them as masters, expecting teachers to run them off instead of having materials ready for teachers to use. Both projects and schools have to do their individual parts to ensure that the implementation will be successful."

Prescriptive Versus Tailor-Made

At what point can programs become too prescriptive or rigid—and lose the flexibility to adapt to an individual school's students and their needs?

Slavin points again to the need for equipoise. "Teachers need to make a program their own," he states succinctly. "If you have a house built for you, the builders have designs you can choose from," he says. "They put up the frame and the walls. Then they go away. You get to decorate it, furnish it, and make it your own. It is not the same as the house next door although it was built by the same builder. You have confidence that the roof doesn't leak, that the walls work, that the heating system is all right. All of those things have been put together competently and they work well together. You, the homeowner, don't have to worry about those things but you still have the opportunity to make it your own, to adapt it to your particular needs and circumstances."

He continues, "This is the kind of balance you are trying to reach with school innovations. The main structures need to be there: the student materials, the training procedures, and the ways of doing student assessment. But if a teacher has a way of adapting the structures to accomplish the same goal, then the school should do it. That should be a part of putting the program together to meet the unique needs of that particular teacher and school."

A Call To Action

A potent reason that schools have not reduced the Hispanic dropout rate relates to the politicization of issues surrounding the English-Only movement and the status of immigrants in the United States. Politicizing the education and futures of so many students, HDP members believe, is at best a nonproductive enterprise. Schools that have been effective at dealing with the Hispanic dropout problem have chosen to step away from endless debates about second language acquisition and how immigrants should be treated in American culture.

"Schools that have succeeded with the Hispanic dropout problem," Secada concludes emphatically, "have bracketed off these debates. They choose to deal with reality in a positive way. Instead, these schools say: The kids are here. They are coming in our doors. Our job is to educate them. We are not going to worry about whether or not they speak English, about whether or not they are immigrants. We are going to worry about what we need to do to give them an education."

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The Hispanic Dropout Project

In September of 1995, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, established the Department of Education's Hispanic Dropout Project. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Hispanic Dropout Project's mission was to shed light on this national crisis, to produce concrete analyses and syntheses, and to recommend actions that can be taken at all levels in order to reduce the nation's dropout rate of Hispanic youth. The project included seven independent individuals with backgrounds in scholarly research, teaching, and administration across grade levels in U.S. schooling and post-secondary education. For more information about the Hispanic Dropout Project, including electronic copies of HDP papers and publications, visit NCBE's Hispanic Dropout Project page at:

http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/used/hdp/index.htm

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